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OLD CARAVAN DAYS

BY

MARY HARTWELL CATHERWOOD

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OLD CARAVAN DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

THE START.

In the year eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, on the fifth day of June, the Padgett carriage-horses faced the west, and their mistress gathered the lines into her mitted hands.

The moving-wagon was ready in front of the carriage. It was to be driven by Zene, the lame hired man. Zene was taking a last drink from that well at the edge of the garden, which lay so deep that your face looked like a star in it. Robert Day Padgett, Mrs. Padgett's grandson, who sat on the back seat of the carriage, decided that he must have one more drink, and his aunt Corinne who sat beside him, was made thirsty by his decision. So the two children let down the carriage steps and ran to the well.

It was like Sunday all over the farm, only the cattle were not straying over the fields. The house was shut up, its new inhabitants not having arrived. Some neighbor women had come to bid the family good-bye again, though it was so early that the garden lay in heavy dew. These good friends stood around the carriage; one of them held the front-door key in trust for the new purchaser. They all called the straight old lady who held the lines grandma Padgett. She was grandma Padgett to the entire neighborhood, and they shook their heads sorrowfully in remembering that her blue spectacles, her ancient Leghorn bonnet, her Quaker shoulder cape and decided face might be vanishing from them forever.

"You'll come back to Ohio," said one neighbor. "The wild Western prairie country won't suit you at all."

"I'm not denying," returned grandma Padgett, "that I could end my

days in peace on the farm here; but son Tip can do very little here, and he can do well out there. I've lost my entire family except son Tip and the baby of all, you know. And it's not my wish to be separated from son Tip in my declining years."

The neighbors murmured that they knew, and one of them inquired as she had often inquired before, at what precise point grandma Padgett's son was to meet the party; and she replied as if giving new information, that it was at the Illinois State line.

"You'll have pretty weather," said another woman, squinting-in the early sun.

"Grandma Padgett won't care for weather," observed the neighbor with the key. "She moved out from Virginia in the dead o' winter."

"Yes; I was but a child," said grandma Padgett, "and this country one unbroken wilderness. We came down the Ohio River by flatboat, and moved into this section when the snow was so deep you could ride across stake-and-rider fences on the drifts."

"Folks can get around easier now, though," said the squinting neighbor, "since they got to going on these railroads."

"I shipped part of my goods on the railroad," remarked grandma Padgett with--a laugh. "But I don't know; I ain't used to the things, and I don't know whether I'd resk my bones for a long distance or not. Son Tip went out on the cars."

"The railroads charge so high," murmured a woman near the back wheels. "But they do say you can ride as far West as you're a goin' on the cars."

"How long will you be gettin' through?" inquired another.

"Not more than two or three weeks," replied grandma Padgett resolutely. "It's a little better than three hundred and fifty miles, I believe."

"That's a long distance," sighed the neighbor at the wheels.

But aunt Corinne and her nephew, untroubled by the length of pilgrimage before them, ran from the well into the garden.

"I wish the kerns were ripe," said aunt Corinne. "Look out, Bobaday! You're drabblin' the bottoms of your good pants."

"'Twouldn't do any good if the kerns were ripe," said Bobaday, turning his pepper-and-salt trousers up until the linings showed. "This farm ain't ours now, and we couldn't pull them."

Aunt Corinne paused at the fennel bed: then she impulsively stretched forth her hand and gathered it full.

"I set out these things," said aunt Corinne, "and I ain't countin' them sold till the wagon starts." So she gathered sweetbrier, and a leaf of sage and two or three pinks.

"O Bobaday," said aunt Corinne--this name being a childish corruption of Robert Day: for aunt Corinne two years younger than her nephew, and had talked baby talk when he prided himself on distinct English--"you s'pose brother Tip's got a garden like this at the new place? Oh, the pretty little primroses! Who'll watch them pop open to-night? How you and me have sat on the primrose bed and watched the t-e-e-nty buds swell and swell till finally--pop! they smack their lips and burst wide open!"

"We'll have a primrose bed out West," said Bobaday. "We'll plant sweet anise too, and have caraway seeds to put in the cakes. Aunt Krin, did you know grandma's goin' to have green kern pie when we stop for dinner to-day?"

"I knew there was kern pie made," said aunt Krin. "I guess we better get into the carriage."

She held her short dress away from the bushes, and scampered with Bobaday into the yard. Here they could not help stopping on the warped floor of the porch to look into the empty house. It looked lonesome already. A mouse had ventured out of the closet by the tall sitting-room mantel; and a faint outline of the clock's shape remained on the wall.

The house with its trees was soon fading into the past. The neighbors were going home by the road or across fields. Zene's wagon, drawn by the old white and gray, moved ahead at a good pace. It was covered with white canvas drawn tight over hoops which were held by iron clamps to the wagon-sides. At the front opening sat Zene, resting his feet on the tongue. The rear opening was puckered to a round O by a drawing string. Swinging to and fro from the hind axle, hung the tar-bucket. A feed box was fitted across the hind end of the wagon. Such stores as might be piled to the very canvas roof, were concealed from sight by a black oilcloth apron hanging behind Zene. This sheet of oilcloth was designed for an additional roof to keep the goods dry when it rained.

Under the wagon, keeping well away from the tar-bucket, trotted Boswell and Johnson. Bobaday named them; he had read something of English literature in his grandfather's old books. Johnson was a fat black and white dog, who was obliged to keep his tongue out of his mouth to pant during the greater part of his days. He had fits of meditation, when Boswell galloped all over him without provoking a snap. Johnson was, indeed, a most amiable fellow, and had gained a reputation as a good watch dog, because on light nights he barked the shining hours away.

Boswell was a little short-legged dog, built like a clumsy weasel;

for his body was so long it seemed to plead for six legs instead of four, to support it, and no one could blame his back for swaying a little in the middle. Boswell was a brindled dog. He had yellow spots like pumpkin seeds over his eyes. His affection for Johnson was extreme. He looked up to Johnson. If he startled a bird at the roadside, or scratched at the roots of a tree after his imagination, he came back to Johnson for approval, wagging his tail until it made his whole body undulate. Johnson sometimes condescended to rub a nose against his silly head, and this threw him into such fire of delight that he was obliged to get out of the wagon-track, and bark around himself in a circle until the carriage left him behind. Then he came up to Johnson again, and panted along beside him, with a smile as open and constant as sunshine.

No such caravan as the Padgett family has been seen moving West since those days when all the States were in a ferment: when New York and the New England States poured into Ohio, and Pennsylvania and Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee into Indiana, Illinois, and even--as a desperate venture, Missouri. The Old National Turnpike was then a lively thoroughfare. Sometimes a dozen white-covered wagons stretched along in company. All classes of society were represented among the movers. There were squalid lots to--be avoided as thieves: and there were carriages full of families who would raise Senators, Presidents, and large financiers in their new home. The forefathers of many a man and woman, now abroad studying older civilization in Europe, came West as movers by the wagon route.

Aunt Corinne and her nephew were glad when Zene drove upon the 'pike, and the carriage followed. The 'pike had a solid rumbling base to offer wheels. You were comparatively in town while driving there, for every little while you met somebody, and that body always appeared to feel more important for driving on the 'pike. It was a glittering white highway the ruts worn by wheels were literally worn in stone. Yet never were roadsides as green as the sloping 'pike sides. No trees encroached very close upon it, and it stretched in endless glare. But how smoothly you bowled along! People living aside in fields, could hear your progress; the bass roar of the 'pike was as distinct, though of course not as loud, as the rumble of a train.

Going through Reynoldsburg however, was the great triumphal act of leave-taking. The Padgetts went to church in Reynoldsburg. To-day it is a decayed village, with many of its houses leaning wearily to one side, or forward as if sinking to a nap. But then it was a lively coach town, the first station out from the capital of the State.

[Illustration: THE STAGE SWEEP BY LIKE A FLASH.]

The Reynoldsburgers looked forth indifferently. They saw movers every hour of the day. But with recognition growing in their faces, many of them hastened to this particular carriage for parting words with grandma Padgett and the children. Robert Day set up against the high back, accepting his tribute of envious glances from the boys he knew. He was going off to meet adventures. They--had to stay at home

and saw wood, and some of them would even be obliged to split it when they had a tin box full of bait and their fish-poles all ready for the afternoon's useful employment. There had been a time when Robert thought he would not like to be called "movers." Some movers fell entirely below his ideas. But now he saw how much finer it was to be travelling in a carriage than on the swift-shooting cars. He felt sorry for the Reynoldsburg boys. One of them hinted that he might be expected out West himself some day, and told Robert to watch down the road for him. He appeared to think the West was a large prairie full of benches, where folks sat down and told their adventures in coming.

Bobaday considered his position in the carriage the only drawback to the Reynoldsburg parade. He ought to be driving. In the course of the journey he hoped grandma Padgett would give up the lines--which she had never yet done.

They drove out of Reynoldsburg. The tin-covered steeple on the church dazzled their eyes for perhaps the last time.

Then coming around a curve in the 'pike appeared that soul-stirring sight, the morning stage from Columbus. Zene and grandma Padgett drew off to the side of the road and gave it a wide passage, for the stage had the same right of way that any regular train now has on its own track. It was drawn by six of the proudest horses in the world, and the grand-looking driver who guided them, gripped the complication of lines in his left hand while he held a horn to his mouth with the right, and through this he blew a mellow peal to let the Reynoldsburgers know the stage was coming. The stage, billowing on springs, was paneled with glittering pictures, gilded on every part, and evidently lined with velvet. Travellers inside looked through the open windows with what aunt Corinne considered an air of opulent pride. She had always longed to explore the interior of a stage, and envied any child who had been shut in by the mysterious click and turn of the door-handle. The top was crowded with gentlemen looking only less important than the luxurious passengers inside: and behind on a vast rack was such a mountain of-baggage swaying with the stage, but corded firmly to place, and topped with bandboxes, that aunt Corinne believed their moving wagon would not have contained it all. Yet the stage swept past like a flash. All its details had to be gathered by a quick eye. The leaders flew over the smooth thoroughfare, holding up their heads like horse princes; and Bobaday knew what a bustle Reynoldsburg would be in during the few minutes that the stage halted.

After viewing this sumptuous pageant the little caravan moved briskly on toward Columbus. Zene kept some distance ahead, yet always in sight. And in due time the city began to grow around them. The 'pike never lost its individuality among the streets of the capital. They saw the great penitentiary surrounded by stone walls as thick as the length of a short boy. They saw trains of cars trailing in and out; manufactories, and vistas of fine streets full of stores. They even saw the capitol building standing high up on its shaded grounds, many steps and massive pillars giving entrance to the structure which

grandma Padgett said was one of the finest in the United States. It was not very long before they reached the western side of the city and were crossing the Scioto River in a long bridge and entering what was then a shabby suburb called Frankfort. At this point aunt Corinne and her nephew entered unbroken ground.

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE-OLD MAN WITH A BAG ON HIS BACK.

Grandma Padgett had prepared the noon lunch that very day, but scarcely expected to make use of it. On the western borders of Columbus lived a cousin Padgett in such a country place as had long been the talk of the entire family connection. Cousin Padgett was a mighty man in the city, and his wife and daughters had unheard-of advantages. He had kept up a formal but very pleasant intercourse with grandma's branch; and when he learned at the State Fair, the year previous, her son Tip's design to cast their future lots in the West, he said he should take it very ill if they did not spend the first night of their journey with him. Grandma Padgett decided that relationship must claim her for at least one meal.

Bobaday and Corinne saw Zene pause at the arched gates of this modern castle, according to his morning's instructions. Corinne's heart thumped apprehensively. It was a formidable thing to be going to cousin Padgett's. He lived in such overwhelming grandeur. She knew, although she had never seen his grounds, that he kept two gardeners on purpose to take care of them. His parlors were covered with carpets in which immense bouquets of flowers were wrought, and he had furniture not only of horsehair, but of flowered red velvet also. I suppose in these days cousin Padgett's house would be considered the extreme of expensive ugliness, and a violation of all laws of beauty. But it was the best money could buy then, and that was considered enough. Robert was not affected by the fluttering care of his young aunt. He wanted to see this seat of grandeur. And when Zene walked back down the avenue from making inquiries, and announced that the entire family were away from home, Bobaday felt a shock of disappointment.

Cousin Padgett did not know the exact date of the removal, and people wrote few letters in those days. So he could not be blamed for his absence when they came by. Zene limped up to his seat in front of the wagon, and they moved forward along the 'pike.

"Good!" breathed aunt Corinne, settling back.

"'Tisn't good a bit!" said Bobaday.

And whom should they meet in a few miles but cousin Padgett himself,

riding horseback and leading a cream-colored horse which he had been into the country to purchase. This was almost as trying as taking dinner at his house. He insisted that the party should turn back. His wife and daughters had only driven into the city that morning. Cousin Padgett was a charming, hearty man, with a ring of black whiskers extending under his face from ear to ear, and the more he talked the less Corinne feared him. When he found that his kinspeople could not be prevailed upon to return with him, he tied up his horses to the wagon in the wood-shed where Zene unhitched, and took dinner with grandma Padgett.

Aunt Corinne sat on a log beside him and ate currant pie. He went himself to the nearest house and brought water. And when a start was made, he told the children he still expected a visit from them, and put as a parting gift a gold dollar as delicate as an old three-cent piece, into the hand of each.

Bobaday felt his loss when the cream-colored horse could no longer be discerned in the growing distance. Grandma Padgett smiled pleasantly ahead through her blue glasses: she had received the parting good wishes of a kinsman; family ties had very strong significance when this country was newer. Aunt Corinne gazed on the warm gold dollar in her palm, and wagged her head affectionately over it for cousin Padgett's sake.

The afternoon sun sagged so low it stared into grandma's blue spectacles and made even Corinne shelter her eyes. Zene drove far ahead with his load to secure lodgings for the night. Having left behind the last acquaintance and entered upon the realities of the journey, grandma considered it time to take off her Leghorn bonnet and replace it with the brown barege one drawn over wire. So Bobaday drew out a bandbox from under the back seat and helped grandma make the change. The seat-curtain dropped over the Leghorn in its bandbox; and this reminded him that there were other things beside millinery stowed away in the carriage. Playthings could be felt by an appreciative hand thrust under the seat; and a pocket in the side curtain was also stuffed.

"I think I'll put my gold money in the bottom of that pocket," said aunt Corinne, "just where I can find it easy every day."

She drew out all the package and dropped it in, and, having stuffed the pocket again, at once emptied it to see that her piece had not slipped through some ambushed hole. Aunt Corinne was considered a flighty damsel by all her immediate relatives and acquaintances. She had a piquant little face containing investigating hazel eyes. Her brown hair was cut square off and held back from her brow by a round comb. Her skin was of the most delicate pink color, flushing to rosy bloom in her cheeks. She was a long, rather than a tall girl, with slim fingers and slim feet, and any excitement tingled over her visibly, so that aunt Corinne was frequently all of a quiver about the most trivial circumstances. She had a deep dimple in her chin and another at the right side of her mouth, and her nose tipped just

enough to give all the lines of her face a laughing look.

But this laughing look ran ludicrously into consternation when, twisting away from the prospect ahead, she happened to look suddenly backward under the looped-up curtain, and saw a head dodging down. Somebody was hanging to the rear of the carriage.

Aunt Corinne kneeled on the cushion and stretched her neck and eyes out over a queer little old man, who seemed to carry a bunch of some kind on his back. He had been running noiselessly behind the carriage, occasionally hanging by his arms, and he was taking one of these swings when his dodging eyes met hers, and he let go, rolling in the 'pike dust.

"You _better_ let go!" scolded aunt Corinne. "Bob'day, there's a beggar been hangin' on! Ma Padgett, a little old man with a bag on his back was goin' to climb into this carriage!"

[Illustration: A QUEER LITTLE OLD MAN.]

"Tisn't a bag," said Bobaday laughing, for the little old man looked funny brushing the dust off his ragged knees.

"_'Tis_ a bag," said aunt Corinne, "and he ought to hurt himself for scarin' us."

"There's no danger of his doing us harm," said grandma Padgett mildly, after she had leaned out at the side and brought her blue glasses to bear upon the lessening figure of the little old man.

Yet Corinne watched him when he sat down on a bank to rest; she watched him grow a mere bunch and battered hat, and then fade to a speck.

The 'pike was the home of such creatures as he appeared to be. The advance guard of what afterwards became an army of tramps, was then just beginning to move. But they were few, and, whether they asked help or not, were always known by the disreputable name of "beggars." A beggar-man or beggar-woman represented to the minds of aunt Corinne and her nephew such possible enemies as chained lions or tigers. If an "old beggar" got a chance at you there was no telling in what part of the world he would make merchandise of you! They always suspected the beggar boys and girls were kidnapped children. While it was desirable to avoid these people, it was even more desirable that a little girl should not offend them.

Aunt Corinne revolved in her mind the remark she had made to the little old man with a bag on his back. She could take no more pleasure in the views along the 'pike; for she almost expected to see him start out of a culvert to give her cold shivers with his revengeful grimaces. The culverts were solid arches of masonry which carried the 'pike unbroken in even a line across the many runs and brooks. The tunnel of the culvert was regarded by most children as

the befitting lair of beggars, who perhaps would not object to standing knee-deep in water with their heads against a slimy arch.

"This is the very last culvert," sighed Corinne, relieved, as they rumbled across one and entered the village where they were to stop over night.

It was already dusk. The town dogs were beginning to bark, and the candles to twinkle. Zene's wagon was unhitched in front of the tavern, and this signified that the carriage-load might confidently expect entertainment. The tavern was a sprawled-out house, with an arch of glass panes over the entrance door. A fat post stood in front of it, upholding a swinging sign.

The tavern-keeper came out of the door to meet them when they stopped, and helped his guests alight, while a hostler stood ready to lead the horses away.

Aunt Corinne sprung down the steps, glad of the change after the day's ride, until, glancing down the 'pike over their late route, she saw tramping toward the tavern that little old man with a bag on his back.

CHAPTER III.

THE TAVERN.

But the little old man with a bag on his back was left out in the dusk, and aunt Corinne and her party went into the tavern parlor. The landlady brought a pair of candles in brass candlesticks, setting one on each end of the mantel. Between them were snuffers on a snuffer-tray, and a tall mass of paper roses under a glass case. The fireplace was covered by a fireboard on which was pasted wallpaper like that adorning the room. Grandma Padgett sat down in a rocking settee, and Corinne and Bobaday on two of the chairs ranged in solemn rows along the wall. They felt it would be presumption to pull those chairs an inch out of line.

It was a very depressing room. Two funeral urns hung side by side, done in India ink, and framed in chipped-off mahogany. Weeping willows hung over the urns, and a weeping woman leaned on each. There was also a picture of Napoleon in scarlet standing on the green rock of St. Helena, holding a yellow three-cornered hat under his elbow. The house had a fried-potato odor, to which aunt Corinne did not object. She was hungry. But, besides this, the parlor enclosed a dozen other scents; as if the essences of all the dinners served in the house were sitting around invisible on the chairs. There was not lacking even that stale cupboard smell which is the spirit of hunger itself.

The landlady was very fat and red and also melancholy. She began talking at once to Grandma Padgett about the loss of her children whom the funeral urns commemorated, and Grandma Padgett sympathized with her and tried to outdo her in sorrowful experiences. But this was impossible; for the landlady had-lived through more ordeals than anybody else in town, and her manner said plainly, that no passing stranger should carry off her championship.

So she made the dismal room so doleful with her talk that aunt Corinne began to feel terribly about life, and Robert Day wished he had gone to the barn with Zene.

Then the supper-bell rung, and the landlady showed them into the big bare dining-room where she forgot all her troubles in the clatter of plates and cups. A company of men rushed from what was called the bar-room, though its shelves and counter were empty of decanters and glasses. They had the greater part of a long table to themselves, and Zene sat among them. These men the landlady called the boarders: she placed Grandma Padgett's family at the other end of the table; it seemed the decorous thing to her that a strip of empty table should separate the boarders and women-folks.

There were stacks of eatables, including mango stuffed with cabbage and eggs pickled red in beet vinegar. All sorts of fruit butters and preserves stood about in glass and earthen dishes. One end of the table was an exact counterpart of the other, even to the stacks of mighty bread-slices. Boiled cabbage and onions and thick corn-pone with fried ham were there to afford a strong support through the night's fast. Nothing was served in order: you helped yourself from the dishes or let them alone at your pleasure. The landlord appeared just as jolly as his wife was dismal. He sat at the other end of the table and urged everybody with jokes to eat heartily; yet all this profusion was not half so appetizing as some of Grandma Padgett's fried chicken and toast would have been.

After supper Bobaday went out to the barn and saw a whole street of horse-stalls, the farthest horse switching his tail in dim distance; and such a mow of hay as impressed him with the advantages of travel. A hostler was forking down hay for the evening's feeding, and Robert climbed to his side, upon which the hostler good-naturedly took him by the shoulders and let him slide down and alight upon the spongy pile below. This would have been a delightful sensation had Bobaday not bitten his tongue in the descent. But he liked it better than the house where his aunt Corinne wandered uneasily up stairs which were hollowed in the middle of each step, and along narrow passages where bits of plaster had fallen off.

There was a dulcimer in the room aunt Corinne occupied with her mother. She took the hammer and beat on its rusty wires some time before going to bed. It tinkled a plea to her to let it alone, but what little girl could look at the queer instrument and keep her hands off it? The landlady said it was left there by a travelling

showman who could not pay his board. He hired the bar-room to give a concert in, and pasted up written advertisements of his performance in various parts of the town. He sent free tickets to the preacher and schoolmaster, and the landlord's family went in for nothing. Nobody else came, though he played on the flute and harmonium, besides the dulcimer, and sang Lilly Dale, and Roll on, Silver Moon, so touchingly that the landlady wiped her eyes at their mere memory. As he had no money to pay stage-fare further, and the flute and harmonium--a small bellows organ without legs--were easier to carry than the dulcimer, he left it and trudged eastward. And no one at that tavern could tell whether he and his instruments had perished piecemeal along the way, or whether he had found crowded houses and forgotten the old dulcimer in the tide of prosperity.

Grandma Padgett's party ate breakfast before day, by the light of a candle covering its candlestick with a tallow glacier. It made only a hole of shine in the general duskiess of the big dining-room. The landlady bade them a pathetic good-by. She was sure there were dangers ahead of them. The night stage had got in three hours late, owing to a breakdown, and one calamity she said, is only the forerunner of another.

Zene had driven ahead with the load. It was a foggy morning, and drops of moisture hung to the carriage curtains. There was the morning star yet trembling over the town. Aunt Corinne hugged her wrap, and Bobaday stuck his hands deep in his pockets. But Grandma sat erect and drove away undaunted and undamped. She merely searched the inside of the carriage with her glasses, inquiring as a last precaution:

"Have we left anything behind?"

"I got all my things," said Robert. "And my gold dollar's in my pocket."

At this aunt Corinne arose and plunged into the carriage pocket on her side.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUSAN HOUSE.

The contents of that pocket she piled upon her seat; she raked the interior with her nails, then she looked at Robert Day with dilating eyes.

"My gold dollar's gone!" said aunt Corinne. "That little old man with a bag on his back--I just know he got into the barn and took it last night."

"You put it in and took it out so many times yesterday," said Bobaday, "maybe it fell on the carriage floor." So they unavailingly searched the carriage floor.

The little old man with a bag on his back was now fixed in Corinne's imagination as the evil genius of the journey. If he spirited out her gold dollar, what harm could he not do them! He might throw stones at them from sheltered places, and even shoot them with guns. He could jump out of any culvert and scare them almost to death! This destroyed half her pleasure as the day advanced, in watching boys fish with horse-hair snares in the runs which trickled under culverts. But Robert felt so much interest in the process that he was glad to have the noon halt made near such a small fishing-place. He took his lunch and sat on the bank with the boys. They were very dirty, and one of them had his shirtsleeve split to the shoulder, revealing a sun-blistered elbow joint that still worked with a right good will at snaring. But no boys were ever fuller of out-door wisdom. They had been swimming, and knew the best diving-hole in the world, only a couple of miles away. They had dined on berries, and expected to catch it when they got home, but meant to attend a show in one of their barns that afternoon, the admission price being ten pins. Bobaday learned how to make a slip-knot with the horse-hair and hold it in silent suspense just where the minnows moved: the moment a fish glided into the open snare a dexterous jerk whipped him out of the water, held firmly about the middle by the hair noose. It required skill and nice handling, and the split-sleeved boy was the most accomplished snarer of all.

[Illustration: BOBADAY LUNCHES WITH STRANGE BOYS.]

Robert shared his lunch with these youths, and parted from them reluctantly when the horses were put in. But aunt Corinne who stood by in a critical attitude, said she couldn't see any use in catching such little fish. You never fried minnies. You used 'em for bait in deep water, though, the split-sleeved boy condescended to inform her, and you could put 'em into a glass jar, and they'd grow like everything. Aunt Corinne was just becoming fired with anxiety to own such a jarful herself, when the carriage turned toward the road and her mother obliged her to climb in.

About the middle of the afternoon Zene halted and waited for the carriage to come up. He left his seat and came to the rear of Old Hickory, the off carriage horse, slapping a fly flat on Old Hickory's flank as he paused.

"What's the matter, Zene?" inquired Grandma Padgett. "Has anything happened?"

"No, marm," replied Zene. He was a quiet, singular fellow, halting in his walk on account of the unevenness of his legs; but faithful to the family as either Boswell or Johnson. Grandma Padgett having brought him up from a lone and forsaken child, relied upon all the

good qualities she discovered from time to time, and she saw nothing ludicrous in Zene. But aunt Corinne and Bobaday never ceased to titter at Zene's "marm."

"I've been inquiren' along, and we can turn off of the 'pike up here at the first by-road, and then take the first cross-road west, and save thirty mile o' toll gates. The road goes the same direction. It's a good dirt road."

Grandma Padgett puckered the brows above her glasses. She did not want to pay unnecessary bounty to the toll-gate keepers.

"Well, that's a good plan, Zene, if you're sure we won't lose the way, or fall into any dif-fick-ulty."

"I've asked nigh a dozen men, and they all tell the same tale," said Zene.

"People ought to know the lay of the land in their own neighborhood," admitted Grandma Padgett. "Well, we'll try what virtue there is in the dirt road."

So she clucked to the carriage horses and Zene went back to his charge.

The last toll-gate they would see for thirty miles drew its pole down before them. Zene paid according to the usual arrangement, and the toll-man only stood in the door to see the carriage pass.

"I wouldn't like to live in a little bit of a house sticking out on the 'pike like that," said aunt Corinne to her nephew. "Folks could run against it on dark nights. Does he stay there by himself? And if robbers or old beggars came by they could nab him the minute he opened his door."

"But if he has any boys," suggested Robert looking back, "they can see everybody pass, and it'd be just as good as going some place all the time. And who's afraid of robbers!"

Zene beckoned to the carriage as he turned off the 'pike. For a distance the wagon moved ahead of them, between tall stake fences which were overrun with vines or had their corners crowded with bushes. Wheat and cornfields and sweet-smelling buckwheat spread out on each side until the woods met them, and not a bit of the afternoon heat touched the carriage after that. Aunt Corinne clasped a leather-covered upright which hurt her hand before, and leaned toward the trees on her side. Every new piece of woodland is an unexplored country containing moss-lined stumps, dimples of hollows full of mint, queer-shaped trees, and hickory saplings just the right saddle-curve for bending down as "teeters," such as are never reproduced in any other piece of woodland. Nature does not make two trees alike, and her cool breathing-halls under the woods' canopies are as diverse as the faces of children wandering there. Moss or lichens grow thicker in one spot; another particular

enclosure you call the lily or the bloodroot woods, and yet another the wild-grape woods. This is distinguished for blackberries away up in the clearings, and that is a fishing woods, where the limbs stretch down to clear holes, and you sit in a root seat and hear springs trickling down the banks while you fish. Though Corinne could possess these reaches of trees only with a brief survey, she enjoyed them as a novelty.

"I would like to get lost in the woods," she observed, "and have everybody out hunting me while I had to eat berries and roots. I don't believe I'd like roots, though: they look so big and tough. And I wouldn't touch a persimmon! Nor Injun turnip. You's a bad boy that time you give me Injun turnip to eat, Bobaday Padgett!"

She turned upon her nephew, fierce with the recollection, and he laughed, saying he wished he'd some to fool somebody with now.

"It bit my mouth so a whole crock of milk wouldn't help it, and if brother Tip'd been home, Ma Padgett wouldn't let you off so easy."

"You wanted to taste it," said Robert. "And you'd eat the green persimmons if they'd puckered your mouth clear shut."

"I wanted to see what the things that the little pig that lived in the stone house filled his churn with, tasted like," admitted aunt Corinne lucidly; so she subsided.

"Do you see the wagon, children?" inquired Grandma Padgett, who felt the necessity of following Zene's lead closely. She stopped Old Hickory and Old Henry at cross-roads.

"No; but he said turn west on the first road we came to," counseled Bobaday.

"And this is the first, I counted," said aunt Corinne.

"I wish we could see the cover ahead of us. We don't want to resk gettin' separated," said Grandma Padgett.

Yet she turned the horses westward with a degree of confidence, and drove up into a hilly country which soon hid the sun. The long shades crept past and behind them. There was a country church, with a graveyard full of white stones nearly smothered in grass and briars. And there was a school-house in an open space, with a playground beaten bare and white in the midst of a yellow mustard jungle. They saw some loiterers creeping home, carrying dinner-pail and basket, and taking a languid last tag of each other. The little girls looked up at the passing carriage from their sunbonnet depths, but the boys had taken off their hats to slap each other with: they looked at the strangers, round-eyed and ready to smile, and Robert and Corinne nodded. Grandma Padgett bethought herself to ask if any of them had seen a moving wagon pass that way. The girls stared bashfully at each other and said "No, ma'am," but the boys affirmed strongly that they

had seen two moving wagons go by, one just as school was out, and the boldest boy of all made an effort to remember the white and gray horses.

The top of a hill soon stood between these children, and the travellers, but in all the vista beyond there was no glimpse of Zene.

Grandma Padgett felt anxious, and her anxiety increased as the dusk thickened.

"There don't seem to be any taverns along this road," she said; "and I hate to ask at any farmer's for accommodations over night. We don't know the neighborhood, and a body hates to be a bother."

"Let's camp out," volunteered Bobaday.

"We'd need the cover off of the wagon to do that, and kittles," said Grandma Padgett, "and dried meat and butter and cake and things _out_ of the wagon."

"Maybe Zene's back in the woods campin' somewhere," exclaimed aunt Corinne. "And he has his gun, and can shoot birds too."

"No, he's goin' along the right road and expectin' us to follow. And as like as not has found a place to put up,--while we're off on the wrong road."

"How'll we ever get to brother Tip's, then?" propounded aunt Corinne. "Maybe we're in Missouri, or Iowa, and won't never get to the Illinois line!"

"Humph!" remarked Robert her nephew; "do you s'pose folks could go to Iowa or Missouri as quick as this! Cars'd have to put on steam to do it."

"And I forgot about the State lines," murmured his aunt. "The' hasn't been any ropes stretched along't _I_ saw."

"They don't bound States with ropes," said Robert Day.

"Well, it's lines," insisted aunt Corinne.

"Do you make out a house off there?" questioned Grandma Padgett, shortening the discussion.

"Yes, ma'am, and it's a tavern," assured her grandson, kneeling upon the cushion beside her to stretch his neck forward.

It was a tavern in a sandy valley. It was lighting a cautious candle or two as they approached. A farmer was watering his team at the trough under the pump spout. All the premises had a look of Holland, which Grandma Padgett did not recognize: she only thought them very clean. There was a side door cut across the centre like the doors of

mills, so that the upper part swung open while the lower part remained shut. A fat white woman leaned her elbows upon this, scarcely observing the travellers.

Grandma Padgett paused at the front of the house and waited for somebody to come out. The last primrose color died slowly out of the sky. If the tavern had any proprietor, he combined farming with tavern keeping. His hay and wheat fields came close to the garden, and his corn stood rank on rank up the hills.

"They must be all asleep in there," fretted Grandma Padgett. The woman with her arms over the half door had not stirred.

"Shall I run in?" said Bobaday.

"Yes, and ask if Zene stopped here. I don't see a sign of the wagon."

Her grandson opened the carriage door and ran down the steps. The white-scrubbed hall detained him several minutes before he returned with a large man who smoked a crooked-stemmed pipe during the conference. The man held the bowl of the pipe in his hand which was fat and red. So was his face. He had a mighty tuft of hair on his upper lip. His shirt sleeves shone like new snow through the dark.

"Goot efenins," he said very kindly.

"I want to stop here over night," said Grandma Padgett. "We're moving, and our wagon is somewhere on this road. Have you seen anything of a wagon--and a white and a gray horse?"

"Oh, yes," said the tavern keeper, nodding his head. "Dere is lots of wakkons on de road aheadt."

"Well, we can't go further ourselves. Can you take the lines?"

"Oh, nein," said the tavern-keeper mildly. "I don't keep moofers mit my house. Dey goes a little furter."

"You don't keep movers!" said Grandma Padgett indignantly. "What's your tavern for?"

"Oh, yah," replied the host with undisturbed benevolence. "Dey goes a little furter."

"Why have you put out a sign to mislead folks?"

The tavern keeper took the pipe out of his mouth to look up at his sign. It swayed back and forth in the valley breeze, as if itself expostulating with him.

"Dot's a goot sign," he pronounced. "Auf you go up te hill, tere ist te house I put up mit te moofers. First house. All convenient. You sthay tere. I coom along in te mornin'. Tere ist more as feefty

famblies sthoph mit tat house. Oh, nien, I don't keep moofers mit te tafern."

"This is a queer way to do," said Grandma Padgett, fixing the full severity of her glasses on him. "Turn a woman and two children away to harbor as well as they can in some old barn! I'll not stop in your house on the hill. Who'd 'tend to the horses?"

"Tare ist grass and water," said the landlord as she turned from his door. "And more as feefy famblies hast put up tere. I don't keep moofers mit te tafern."

Robert and Corinne felt very homeless as she drove at a rattling pace down the valley. They were hungry, and upon an unknown road; and that inhospitable tavern had turned them away like vagrants.

"We'll drive all night before we'll stop in his movers' pen," said Grandma Padgett with her well-known decision. "I suppose he calls every vagabond that comes along a mover, and his own house is too clean for such gentry. I've heard about the Swopes and the Dutch being stupid, but a body has to travel before they know."

But well did the Dutch landlord know the persuasion of his house on the hill after luckless travellers had passed through a stream which drained the valley. This was narrow enough, but the very banks had a caving, treacherous look. Grandma Padgett drove in, and the carriage came down with a plunge on the flanks of Old Hickory and Old Henry, and they disappeared to their nostrils and the harness strips along the centre of their backs.

[Illustration: "HASN'T THE CREEK ANY BOTTOM?" CRIED GRANDMA PADGETT.]

"Hasn't the creek any bottom?" cried Grandma Padgett, while Corinne and Robert clung to the settling carriage. The water poured across their feet and rose up to their knees. Hickory and Henry were urged with whip and cry.

"Hold fast, children! Don't get swept out!" Grandma Padgett exhorted. "There's no danger if the horses can climb the bank."

They were turned out of their course by the current, and Hickory and Henry got their fore feet out, crumbling a steep place. Below the bank grew steeper. If they did not get out here, all must go whirling and sinking down stream. The landing was made, both horses leaping up as if from an abyss. The carriage cracked, and when its wheels once more ground the dry sand, Grandma Padgett trembled awhile, and moved her lips before replying to the children's exclamations.

"We've been delivered from a great danger," she said. "And that miserable man let us drive into it without warning!"

"If I's big enough," said Robert Day, "I'd go back and thrash him."

"It ill becomes us," rebuked Grandma Padgett, "to give place to wrath after escaping from peril. But if this is the trap he sets for his house on the hill, I hope he has been caught in it himself sometime!"

"Where'll we go now?" Corinne wailed, having considered it was time to begin crying. "I'm drowned, and my teeth knock together, I'm gettin' so cold!"

They paused at the top of the hill, Corinne still lamenting.

"I don't want to stop here," said Grandma Padgett, adding, "but I suppose we must."

The house was large and weather-beaten; its gable-end turned toward the road. The "feefy famblies" had left no trace of domestic life. Grass and weeds grew to the lower windows. The entrance was at one side through a sea of rank growths.

"It looks like they's ghosts lived here," pronounced Robert dismally.

"Don't let me hear such idle speeches!" said Grandma Padgett, shaking her head. "Spooks and ghosts only live in people's imaginations."

"If they got tired of that," said Robert, "they'd come to live here."

"The old house looks like its name was Susan," wept Corinne. "Are we goin' to stay all night in this Susan house, ma?"

Her parent stepped resolutely from the carriage, and Bobaday hastened to let down some bars. He helped his grandmother lead the horses into a weedy enclosure, and there unhitch them from the carriage. There was a shed covered with straw which served for a stable. The horses were watered--Robert wading to his neck among cherry sprouts to a curb well, and unhooking the heavy bucket from its chain, after a search for something else available. Then leaving the poor creatures to browse as best they could, the party prepared to move upon the house. Aunt Corinne came out of the wet carriage.

Grandma Padgett picked up some sticks and chips. They attempted to unlock the door; but the lock was broken. "Anybody can go in!" remarked the head of the party. "But I don't know that we can even build a fire, and as to provisions, I s'pose we'll have to starve this night."

But stumbling into a dark front room, and feeling hopelessly along the mantel, they actually found matches. The tenth one struck flame.

There were ashes and black brands in the fireplace, left there possibly, by the landlord's last moofer. Grandma Padgett built a fire to which the children huddled, casting fearful glances up the damp-stained walls. The flame was something like a welcome.

"Perhaps," said Grandma with energy, "there are even provisions in the house. I wouldn't grudge payin' that man a good price and cookin' them myself, if I could give you something to eat."

"We can look," suggested Bobaday. "They'd be in the cellar, wouldn't they?"

"It's lots lonesomer than our house was the morning we came away," chattered aunt Corinne, warming her long hands at the blaze.

And now beneath the floor began a noise which made even Grandma Padgett stand erect, glaring through her glasses.

"_Something's_ in the cellar!" whispered Bobaday.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUSAN HOUSE CELLAR.

It was not pleasant to stand in a strange house in an unknown neighborhood, drenched, hungry and unprotected, hearing fearful sounds like danger threatening under foot.

Corinne felt a speechless desire to be back in the creek again and on the point of drowning; that would soon be over. But who could tell what might occur after this groaning in the cellar?

"I heard a noise," said Grandma Padgett, to bespeak their attention, as if they could remember ever hearing anything else.

"It's cats, I think," said Robert Day, husky with courage.

Cats could not groan in such short and painful catches. Conjectures of many colors appeared and disappeared like flashes in Bobaday's mind. The groaner was somebody that bad Dutch landlord had half murdered and put in the cellar. Maybe the floor was built to give way and let every traveller fall into a pit! Or it might be some boy or girl left behind by wicked movers to starve. Or a beggarman, wanting the house to himself, could be making that noise to frighten them away.

The sharp groans were regularly uttered. Corinne buried her head in her mother's skirts and waited to be taken or left, as the Booggar pleased.

"Well," said Grandma Padgett, "I suppose we'll have to go and see what ails that Thing down there. It may be a human bein' in distress."

Robert feared it was something else, but he would not have mentioned it to his grandmother.

"What'll we carry to see with?" he eagerly inquired. It was easy to be eager, because they had no lights except the brands in the fireplace.

Grandma Padgett, who in her early days had carried live coals from neighbors' houses miles away, saw how to dispense with lamp or candle. She took a shovel full of embers--and placed a burning chip on top. The chip would have gone out by itself, but was kept blazing by the coals underneath.

"Shall I go ahead?" inquired Robert.

"No, you walk behind. And you might carry a piece of stick," replied his grandmother, conveying a hint which made his shoulder blades feel chilly.

They moved toward the cellar entrance in a slow procession, to keep the chip from flaring out.

"Don't hang to me so!" Grandma Padgett remonstrated with her daughter. "I sh'll step on you, and down we'll all go and set the house afire."

Garrets are cheerful, cobwebby places, always full of slits where long, smoky sun-rays can poke in. An amber warmth cheers the darkness of garrets; you feel certain there is nothing ugly hiding behind the remotest and dustiest box. If rats or mice inhabit it, they are jovial fellows. But how different is a cellar, and especially a cellar neglected. You plunge down rough steps into a cavern. A mouldy air from dried-up and forgotten vegetables meets you. The earth may not be moist underfoot, but it has not the kind feeling of sun-warmed earth. And if big rats hide there, how bold and hideous they are! There are cool farmhouse cellars floored with cement and shelved with sweet-smelling pine, where apple-bins make incense, and swinging-shelves of butter, tables of milk crocks, lines of fruit cans and home-made catsup bottles, jars of pickles and chowder, and white covered pastry and cake, promise abundant hospitality. But these are inverted garrets, rather than cellars. They are refrigerators for pure air; and they keep a mellow light of their own. When you go into one of them it seems as if the house were standing on its head to express its joy and comfort.

But the Susan House cellar was one of dread, aside from the noise proceeding out of it. Bobaday knew this before they opened a door upon a narrow-throated descent.

One of Zene's stories became vivid. It was a story of a house where nobody could stay, though the landlord offered it rent-free. But along came two good youths without any money, and for board and lodging, they undertook to break the spell by sleeping there three nights. The first two nights they were not disturbed, and sat with

their candle, reading good books until after midnight. But the third, just on the stroke of twelve, a noise began in the cellar! So they took their candle, and, armed with nothing except good books, went below, and in the furthest corner they saw a little old man with a red nightcap on his head, sitting astride of a barrel! In Zene's story the little old man only had it on his mind to tell these good youths where to dig for his money; and when they had secured the money, he amiably disappeared, and the house was pleasant to live in ever afterward.

This tale, heard in the barn while Zene was greasing harnesses, and heard without Grandma Padgett's sanction, now made her grandson shiver with dread as his feet went down into the Susan House dungeon. It was trying enough to be exploring a strange cellar full of groans, without straining your eyes in expectation of seeing a little old man in a red nightcap, sitting astride of a barrel!

"Who's there?" said Grandma Padgett with stern emphasis, as she held her beacon stretched out into the cellar.

The groaning ceased for an awful space of time. Aunt Corinne was behind her nephew, and she squatted on the step to peer with distended eyes, lest some hand should reach up and grab her by the foot.

It was a small square cellar, having earthen sides, but piles of pine boxes made ambushes everywhere.

"Come out!" Grandma Padgett spoke again. "We won't have any tricks played. But if you're hurt, we can help you."

It was like addressing solid darkness, for the chip was languishing upon its coals, and cast but a dim red glare around the shovel.

Still some being crept toward them from the darkness, uttering a prolonged and hearty groan, as if to explode at once the accumulations of silence.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. MATTHEWS.

Aunt Corinne realizing it was a man, rushed to the top of the steps and hid her eyes behind the door. She knew her mother could deal with him, and, if he offered any harm, pour coals of fire upon his head in a literal sense. But she did not feel able to stand by. Robert, on the other hand, seeing no red nightcap on the head thrust up toward them, supported his grandmother strongly, and even helped to pull the man up-stairs.

One touch of his soft, foolish body was enough to convince any one that he was a harmless creature. His foot was sprained.

Robert carried a backless chair and set it before the fire, and on this the limping man was placed. Grandma Padgett emptied her coals on the hearth and surveyed him. He had a red face and bashful eyes, and while the top of his head was quite bald, he had a half-circle of fuzz extending around his face from ear to ear. He wore a roundabout and trousers, and shoes with copper toes. His hands were fat and dimpled as well as freckled. Altogether, he had the appearance of a hugely overgrown boy, ducking his head shyly while Grandma Padgett looked at him.

"For pity sake!" said Grandma Padgett. "What ails the creature? What's your name, and who are you?"

At that the man chanted off in a nasal sing-song, as if he were accustomed to repeating his rhyme:

J. D. Matthews is my name,
Ohio-r is my nation,
Mud Creek is my dwellin' place,
And glory is my expectation.

"Yes," said Grandma Padgett, removing her glasses, as she did when very much puzzled.

Corinne, in a distant corner of the lighted room, began to laugh aloud, and after looking towards her, the man laughed also, as if they two were enjoying a joke upon the mother.

"Well, it may be funny, but you gave us enough of a scare with your gruntin' and your groanin'," said Grandma Padgett severely.

J. D. Matthews reminded of his recent tribulations, took up one of his feet and began to groan over it again. He was as shapeless and clumsy as a bear, and this motion seemed not unlike the tiltings of a bear forced to dance.

"There you go," said Grandma Padgett. "Can't you tell how you came in the cellar, and what hurt you?"

Mr. Matthews piped out readily, as if he had packed the stanza into shape between the groans of his underground sojourn:

To the cellar for fuel I did go,
And there I met my overthrow;
I lost my footing and my candle,
And grazed my shin and sprained my ankle.

"The man must be a poet," pronounced Grandma Padgett with contempt. "He has to say everything in rhyme."

Chanted Mr. Matthews:

I was not born in a good time,
I cannot speak except in rhyme.

"Ain't he funny?" said Bobaday, rubbing his own knees with enjoyment.

"He's very daft," said the grandmother. "And what to do for him I don't know. We've nothing to eat ourselves. I might wet his foot and tie it up."

Mr. Matthews looked at her smilingly while he recited:

I have a cart that does contain
A pana_seer_ for ev'_ry_ pain.
There's coffee, also there is _chee_,
Sugar and cakes, bread and hone-ee.
I have parch corn and liniment,
Which causes me to feel content.
There is some half a dozen kittles
To serve me when I cook my vittles.
Butter and eggs I do deal in;
To go without would be a sin.
When I sit down to cook my meals,
I know how good a king feels.

"Well, if you had your cart handy it would be worth while," said Grandma Padgett indulgently. "But talkin' of such things when the children are hungry only aggravates a body more."

Producing a key from his roundabout pocket, Mr. Matthews lifted his voice and actually sung:

J. D. Matthews' cart stands at your door.
Lady, will you step out and see my store?
I've cally-co and Irish table linen,
Domestic gingham and the best o' flannen.
I take eggs and butter for these treasures,
I never cheat, but give good measures.

"Let me see if there is a cart," begged Bobaday, reaching for the key which his grandmother reluctantly received.

He then went to the front door and groped in the weeds. The hand-cart was there, and all of Mr. Matthews' statements were found to be true. He had plenty of provisions, as well as a small stock of dry goods and patent medicines, snugly packed in the vehicle which he was in the habit of pushing before him. There were even candles. Grandma Padgett lighted one, and stuck it in an empty liniment bottle. Then she dressed the silly pedler's ankle, and put an abundant supper on the fire to cook in his various kettles; the pedler smiling with pure joy all the time to find himself the centre of such a family party.

Bobaday and Corinne came up, and stood leaning against the ends of the mantel. No poached eggs and toast ever looked so nice; no honey ever had such melting yellow comb; no tea smelled so delicious; no ginger cakes had such a rich moistness. They sat on the carriage cushions and ate their supper with Grandma Padgett. It was placed on the side of an empty box, between them and the pedlerman. He divided his attention betwixt eating and chanting rhymes, interspersing both with furtive laughs, into which he tried to draw the children.

Grandma Padgett overawed him; but he evidently felt on a level with aunt Corinne and her nephew. In his foolish red face there struggled a recollection of having gone fishing, or played marbles, or hunted wild flowers with these children or children like them. He nodded and twinkled his eyes at them, and they laughed at whatever he did. His ankle was so relieved by a magic liniment, that he felt able to hobble around the house when Grandma Padgett explored it, repeating under his breath the burst he indulged in when she arrayed the supper on the box:

O, I went to a friend's house,
The friend says, 'Come in,
Have a hot cup of coffee;
And how have you been?'

Grandma Padgett said she could not sleep until she knew what other creatures were hidden in the house.

They all ascended the enclosed staircase, and searched echoing dusty rooms where rats or mice whisked out of sight at their approach.

"This is a funny kind of an addition to a tavern," remarked the head of the party. "No beds: no anything. We'll build a fire in this upper fireplace, and bring the cushions and shawls up, and see if we can get a wink of sleep. It ain't a cold night, and we're dry now. You can sleep by the fireplace down-stairs," she said to the pedler, "and I'll settle with you for our breakfast and supper before we leave in the morning. It's been a providence that you were in the house."

Mr. Matthews smiled deferentially, and appeared to be pondering a new rhyme about Grandma Padgett. But the subject was so weighty it kept him shaking his head.

They came down-stairs for fuel and coals, and she requested the pedler to take possession of the lower room and make himself comfortable, but not to set the house on fire.

"What shall we give him to sleep on?" pondered the grandmother. "I can't spare things from the children; it won't do to let him sleep on the floor."

"I have a cart, it has been said,
Which serves me both for cupboard and bed,"

chanted Mr. Matthews.

"Well, that's a good thing," said Grandma Padgett. "If you could pull a whole furnished house out of that cart 'twouldn't surprise me."

The pedler opened the door and dragged his cart in over the low sill. They then bolted the door with such rusty fastenings as remained to it.

As soon as he felt the familiar handle on his palms, J. D. Matthews forgot that his ankle had been twisted. He was again upon the road, as free as the small wild creatures that whisked along the fence. Grandma Padgett's grown-up strength of mind failed to restrain him from acting the horse. He neighed, and rattled the cart wildly over the empty room. Now he ran away and pretended to kick everything to pieces; and now he put himself up at a manger, and ground his feed. He broke out of his stable and careened wildly around a pasture, refusing to be hitched, and expressing his contempt for the cart by kicking up at it.

"I guess your sprain wasn't as bad as you let on," observed Grandma Padgett.

The observation, or a twinge, reminded Mr. Matthews to double himself down and groan again.

With painful limps, and Robert Day's assistance, he got the cart before the fireplace. It looked like a narrow, high green box on wheels. The pedler blocked the wheels behind, and propped the handle level. Then he crept with great contentment to the top, and stretched himself to sleep.

"He's a kind of a fowl of the air," said Grandma Padgett.

"Oh, but I hope he's going our road!" said Bobaday, as they re-ascended the stairs. "He's more fun than a drove of turkeys!"

"And I'm not a bit afraid of him," said aunt Corinne. "He ain't like the old man with a bag on his back."

But J. D. Matthews was going in the opposite direction.

Before Grandma Padgett had completed her brief toilet next morning, and while the daylight was yet uncertain, the Dutch landlord knocked at the outer door for his fee. He seemed not at all surprised at finding the pedler lodging there, but told him to stop at the tavern and trade with the vrow.

"And a safe time the poor simple soul will have," said Grandma Padgett, making her spectacles glitter at the landlord, "gettin' through the creek that nigh drowned us. I suppose, you have a ford that you don't keep for movers."

"Oh, yah!" said the landlord. "Te fort ist goot."

"How dared you send a woman and two children to such an empty, miserable shell as this?"

[Illustration: J. D. MATTHEWS RUNS AWAY.]

"I don't keep moofers to mine tafern," said the landlord, putting his abundant charge into his pocket. "Chay-Te, he always stops here. He coes all ofer te countries, Chay-Te toes. His headt ist pat."

"But his heart is good," said the grandmother. "And that will count up more to his credit than if he was an extortioner, and ill-treated the stranger within his gate."

"Oh, Chay-Te ist a goot feller!" said the Dutch landlord comfortably, untouched by any reflections on his own conduct.

Grandma Padgett could not feel placid in her mind until the weeds and hill hid him from sight.

Mr. Matthews arose so sound from his night's slumber, that he was able after pumping a prodigious lot of water over himself, and blowing with enjoyment, to help her get the breakfast, and put the kettles in travelling order afterwards. He had a great many housewifely ways, and his tidiness was a satisfaction to Grandma Padgett. The breakfast was excellent, but Corinne and Bobaday on one side of the box, and J. D. Matthews on the other, exchanged glances of regret at parting. He helped Robert put the horses to the carriage, making blunders at every stage of the hitching up.

They all came out of the Susan House, and he pushed his cart into the road.

"I almost hate to leave it," said aunt Corinne, "because we did have a good time after we were scared so bad."

"Seems as if a body always hates to leave a place," remarked Bobaday. "The next people that come along will never know we lived here one night. But _we'll_ always remember it."

Grandma Padgett before entering the carriage, was trying to make the pedler take pay for the food her family ate. He smiled at her deferentially, but backed away with his cart.

"What a man this is!" she exclaimed impatiently. "We owe you for two meals' vittles."

"I have some half a dozen kittles," murmured Mr. Matthews.

"But won't you take the money? The landlord was keen enough for his."

The pedler had got his rhyme about Grandma Padgett completed. He

left her, still stretching her hand out, and rattled his cart up to the children who were leaning from the carriage towards him.

"She is a lady of renown," chanted J. D. Matthews, indicating their grandmother.

She makes good butter by the pound,
Her hand is kind, so is her tongue;
But when she comes I want to run!

He accordingly ran, rattling the cart like a hailstorm before him, downhill; and out of their sight.

"Ah, there he goes!" sighed aunt Corinne, "and he hardly limps a bit. I hope we'll see him again some time."

"I might 'a forced the money into his pocket," reflected Grandma Padgett, as she took up the lines. "But I'd rather feel in debt to that kind, simple soul than to many another. Why didn't we ask him if he saw Zene's wagon up the road? These poor horses want oats. They'll be glad to sight the white cover once more."

"I would almost rather have him come along," decided Robert Day, "than to find the wagon. For he could make a camp anywhere, and speak his poetry all the time. What fun he must have if he wants to stay in the woods all night. I expect if he wanted to hide he could creep into that cart and stretch out, with his face where he could smell the honey and ginger cakes. I'd like to have a cart and travel like that. Are we going on to the 'pike again, Grandma?"

"Not till we find Zene," she replied, driving resolutely forward on the strange road.

CHAPTER VII.

ZENE'S MAN AND WOMAN.

A covered wagon appeared on the first crossroad, moving steadily between rows of elder bushes. The carriage waited its approach. A figure like Zene's sat resting his feet on the tongue behind the old gray and the old white.

"It's our wagon," said Robert Day. Presently Zene's countenance, and even the cast in his eyes, became a certainty instead of a wavering indistinctness, and he smiled with satisfaction while halting his vehicle at right angles with the carriage.

"Where have you been?" inquired Grandma Padgett.

"Over on t'other road," replied Zene, indicating the direction with his whip, "huntin' you folks. I knowed you hadn't made the right turn somehow."

Grandma Padgett mentioned her experience with the Dutch landlord and the ford, both of which Zene had avoided by taking another cross-road that he had neglected to indicate to them. He said he thought they would see the wagon-track and foller, not bein' fur behind. When he discovered they were not in his train, he was in a narrow road and could not turn; so he tied the horses and walked back a piece. He got on a corn-field fence and shouted to them; but by that time there was no carriage anywhere in the landscape.

"Such things won't do," said Grandma Padgett with some severity.

"No, marm," responded Zene humbly.

"We must keep together," said the head of the caravan.

"Yes, marm," responded Zene earnestly.

"Well, now, you may drive ahead and keep the carriage in sight till it's dinner-time and we come to a good place to halt."

Bobaday said he believed he would get in with Zene and try the wagon awhile. Springs and cushions had become tiresome. He half-stood on the tongue, to bring his legs down on a level with Zene's, and enjoyed the jolting in every piece of his backbone. He had had a surfeit of woman-society. Even the horsey smell of Zene's clothes was found agreeable. And above all, he wanted to talk about J. D. Matthews, and tell the terrors of a bottomless ford and a house with a strange-sounding cellar.

"But the man was the funniest thing," said Bobaday. "He just talked poetry all the time, and Grandma said he was daft. I'd like to talk that way myself, but I can't make it jee."

Zene observed mysteriously, that there were some queer folks in this section.

Yes, Bobaday admitted; the landlord was as Dutch as sour-kroust.

Zene observed that all the queer folks wasn't Dutch. He shook his head and looked so steadily at a black stump that Robert knew his eyes were fixedly cast on the horizon. The boy speculated on the possibility of people with crooked eyes seeing anything clearly. But Zene's hints were a stimulant to curiosity.

"Where did you stay last night?" inquired Robert, bracing himself for pleasant revelations.

"Oh, I thought at first I'd put up in the wagon." replied Zene.

"But you didn't?"

"No: not _intirely_."

"What _did_ you do?" pressed Robert Day.

"Well, I thought I'd better git nigh some house, on account of givin' me a chance to see if you folks come by. I thought you'd inquire at all the houses."

"Did you stop at one?"

[Illustration: ZENE EXCITES BOBADAY'S CURIOSITY.]

"I took the team out _by_ a house. It was plum dark then."

"I'd gone in to see what kind of folks they were first," remarked Bobaday.

"Yes, sir; that's what I'd orto done. But I leads them round to their feed-box after I watered 'em to a spring o' runnin' water. Then I doesn't know but the woman o' the house will give me a supper if I pays for it. So I slips to the side door and knocks. And a man opens the door."

Robert Day drew in his breath quickly.

"How did the man look?" he inquired.

"I can't tell you that," replied Zene, "bekaze I was so struck with the looks of the woman that I looked right past him."

Robert considered the cast in Zene's eyes, and felt in doubt whether he looked at the man and saw the woman, or looked at the woman and saw the man.

"Was she pretty?"

"Pretty!" replied Zene. "Is that flea-bit-gray, grazin' in the medder there, pretty?"

"Well," replied Bobaday, shifting his feet, "that's about as good-looking as one of our old grays."

"You don't know a horse," said Zene indulgently. "Ourn's an iron gray. There's a sight of difference in grays."

"Was the woman ugly?"

"Is a spotted snake ugly?"

"Yes," replied Robert decidedly; "or it 'pears so to me."

"That's how the woman 'peared to me. She was tousled, and looked wild out of her eyes. The man says, says he, 'What do you want?' I s'ze, 'Can I git a bite here?'"

Robert had frequently explained to Zene the utter nonsense of this abbreviation, "I s'ze," but Zene invariably returned to it, perhaps dimly reasoning that he had a right to the dignity of third person when repeating what he had said. If he said of another man, "says he," why could he not remark of himself, "I says he?" He considered it not only correct, but ornamental.

"The man says, says he, 'We don't keep foot-pads.' And I s'ze--for I was mad--'I ain't no more a foot-pad than you are,' I s'ze. 'I've got a team and a wagon out here,' I s'ze, 'and pervisions too, but I've got the means to pay for a warm bite,' I s'ze, 'and if you can't accommodate me, I s'pose there's other neighbors that can.'"

"You shouldn't told him you had money and things!" exclaimed Robert, bulging his eyes.

"I see that, soon's I done it," returned Zene, shaking a line over the near horse. "The woman spoke up, and she says, says she, 'There ain't any neighbor nigher than five miles.' Thinks I, this settlement looked thicker than that. But I doesn't say yea or no to it. And they had me come in and eat. I paid twenty-five cents for such a meal as your gran'marm wouldn't have set down on her table."

"What did they have?"

"Don't ask me," urged Zene; "I'd like to forget it. There was vittles, but they tasted so funny. And they kept inquiren' where I's goin' and who was with me. They was the uneasiest people you ever see. And nothing would do but I must sleep in the house. There was two rooms. I didn't see till I was in bed, that the only door I could get out of let into the room where the man and woman stayed."

Robert Day began to consider the part of Ohio through which his caravan was passing, a weird and unwholesome region, full of shivering delights. While the landscape lay warm, glowing and natural around him, it was luxury to turn cold at Zene's night-peril.

"I couldn't go to sleep," continued Zene, "and I kind of kept my eye on the only window there was."

Robert drew a sigh of relief as he reflected that an enemy watching at the window would be sure Zene was looking just in the opposite direction.

"And the man and woman they whispered."

"What did they whisper about?"

"How do I know?" said Zene mysteriously. "Whisper--whisper--whisper--z-z!"

That's the way they kept on. Sometimes I thought he's threatenin' her, and sometimes I thought she's threatenin' him. But along in the middle of the night they hushed up whisperin'. And then I heard somebody open the outside door and go out. I s'ze to myself, 'Nows the time to be up and ready.' So I was puttin' on the clothes I'd took off, and right there on the bed, like it had been there all the time, was two great big eyes turnin' from green to red, and flame comin' out of them like it does out of coals when the wind blows."

"Was it a cat?" whispered Robert Day, hoping since Zene was safe, that it was not.

Zene passed the insinuation with a derisive puff. He would not stoop to parley about cats in a peril so extreme.

"How do _I_ know what it was?" he replied. "I left one of my socks and took the boot in my hand. It was all the gun or anything o' that kind I had. I left my neckhan'ketcher, too."

"But you didn't get out of the window," objected Bobaday eagerly. "They always have a hole dug, you know, right under the window, to catch folks in."

"Yes, I did," responded Zene, leaping a possible hole in his account. "I guess I cleared forty rod, and I come down on all-fours behind a straw-pile right in the stable-lot."

"Did the thing follow you?"

"Before I could turn around and look, I see that man and that woman leadin' our horses away from the grove where I'd tied 'em to the feed-box."

"What for?" inquired Robert Day.

Zene cast a compassionate glance at his small companion.

"What do folks ever lead critters away in the night for?" he hinted.

"Sometimes to water and feed them."

"I s'ze to myself," continued Zene, ignoring this absurd supposition, "'now, if they puts the horses in their stable, they means to keep the wagon too, and make way with me so no one will ever know it. But,' I s'ze, 'if they tries to lead the horses off somewhere for to hide 'em, then _that's_ all they want, and they'll pretend in the morning to have lost stock themselves.'"

"And which did they do?" urged Robert after a thrilling pause.

"They marched straight for their stable."

The encounter was now to take place. Robert Day braced himself by

means of the wagon-tongue.

"Then what did you do?"

"I rises up," Zene recounted in a cautious whisper, "draws back the boot, and throws with all my might."

"Not at the woman?" urged Bobaday.

"I wanted to break her first," apologized Zene. "She was worse than the man. But I missed her and hit him."

Robert was glad Zene aimed as he did.

"Then the man jumps and yells, and the woman jumps and yells, and the old gray he rears up and breaks loose. He run right past the straw pile, and before you could say Jack Robinson, I had him by the hitch-strap--it was draggin'--and hoppin' against the straw, I jumped on him."

"Jack Robinson," Zene's hearer tried half-audibly. "Then what? Did the man and woman run?"

"I makes old Gray jump the straw pile, and I comes at them just like I rose out of the ground! Yes," acknowledged Zene forbearingly, "they run. Maybe they run toward the house, and maybe they run the other way. I got a-holt of old White's hitch-strap and my boot; then I cantered out and hitched up, and went along the road real lively. It wasn't till towards mornin' that I turned off into the woods and tied up for a nap. Yes, I slept part of the night in the wagon."

Robert sifted all these harrowing circumstances.

"Maybe they weren't stealing the horses," he hazarded. "Don't folks ever unhitch other folks' horses to put 'em in their stable?"

Zene drew down the corners of his mouth to express impatience.

"But I'd hated to been there," Robert hastened to add.

"I guess you would," Zene observed in a lofty, but mollified way, "if you'd seen the pile of bones I passed down the road a piece from that house."

"Bones?"

"Piled all in a heap at the edge of the woods."

"What kind of bones, Zene?"

"Well, I didn't get out to handle 'em. But I see one skull about the size of yours, with a cap on about the size of yours."

This was all that any boy could ask. Robert uttered a derisive "Ho!" but he sat and meditated with pleasure on the pile of bones. It cast a lime-white glitter on the man and woman who but for that might have been harmless.

"I didn't git much rest," concluded Zene. "I could drop off sound now if I'd let myself."

"I'll drive," proposed Bobaday.

Zene reluctantly considered this offer. The road ahead looked smooth enough. "I guess there's no danger unless you run into a fence corner," he remarked.

"I can drive as well as Grandma Padgett can," said Robert indignantly.

Zene wagged his head as if unconvinced. He never intended to let Robert Day be a big boy while he stayed with the family.

"Your gran'marm knows how to handle a horse. Now if I's to crawl back and take a nap, and you's to run the team into any accident, I'd have to bear all the blame."

Robert protested: and when Zene had shifted his responsibility to his satisfaction, he crept back and leaned against the goods, falling into a sound sleep.

The boy drove slowly forward. It seemed that old gray and old white also felt last night's vigils. They drowsed along with their heads down through a landscape that shimmered sleepily.

Robert thought of gathering apples in the home orchard: of the big red ones that used to fall and split asunder with their own weight, waking him sometimes from a dream, with their thump against the sod. What boy hereafter would gather the sheep-noses, and watch the early June's every day until their green turned suddenly into gold, and one bite was enough to make you sit down under the tree and ask for nothing better in life! He used to keep the chest in his room floored with apples. They lay under his best clothes and perfumed them. His nose knew the breath of a russet, and in a dark cellar he could smell out the bell-flower bin. The real poor people of the earth must be those who had no orchards; who could not clap a particular comrade of a tree on the bark and look up to see it smiling back red and yellow smiles; who could not walk down the slope and see apples lying in ridges, or pairs, or dotting the grass everywhere. Robert was half-asleep, dreaming of apples. He felt thirsty, and heard a humming like the buzz of bees around the cider-press. He and aunt Corinne used to sit down by the first tub of sweet cider, each with two straws apiece, and watch their faces in the rosy juice while they drank Cider from the barrels when snow was on the ground, poured out of a pitcher into a glass, had not the ecstatic tang of cider through a straw. The Bees came to the very edge of the tub, as if to dispute such hiving of diluted honey; and more of them came, from hanging with bent bodies,

around the dripping press.

Their buzz increased to a roar. Robert Day woke keenly up to find the old white and the old gray just creeping across a railroad track, and a locomotive with its train whizzing at full speed towards them.

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE ANT RED AND BIG ANT BLACK.

A breath's delay must have been fatal. Robert had no whip, but doubling the lines and shouting at the top of his voice, he braced himself and lashed the gray. The respectable beast leaped with astonishment, dragging its fellow along. The fore wheels cleared the track, and Bobaday's head was filled with the prolonged cry of the locomotive. Zene sprang up, and the hind part of the wagon received a crash which threw the boy out at the side, and Zene quite across the gray's back.

The train came to a stop after running a few yards further. But finding that no lives were lost, it put on steam and disappeared on its course, and Zene and his trembling assistant were trying to prop up one corner of the wagon when Grandma Padgett brought her spectacles to bear upon the scene.

One hind wheel had been splintered by the train, the leap of the gray turning the wagon from the road. Grandma Padgett preserved her composure and asked few questions. Her lips moved at frequent intervals for a long time after this accident. But aunt Corinne flew out of the carriage, and felt her nephew's arms and wailed over the bump his cheek received, and was sure his legs were broken, and that Zene limped more than ever, and that the train had run straight across their prostrate forms.

Zene busied himself with shamefaced eagerness in getting the wagon off the road and preparing to hunt a shop. He made piteous grimaces over every strap he unfastened.

"We cannot leave the goods standing here in the wagon with nobody to watch 'em," said the head of the caravan. "It's nigh dinner-time, and we'll camp in sight, and wait till we can all go on together. A merciful Providence has brought us along safe so far. We mustn't git separated and run ourselves into any more dangers than we can help."

Zene lingered only to pitch the camp and find water at a spring running down into a small creek. Then he bestrode one of the wagon horses, and, carrying the broken wheel-hubs, trotted away.

Grandma Padgett tucked up her dress, took provisions from the wagon,

and got dinner. Aunt Corinne and her nephew made use of this occasion to lay in a supply of nuts for winter. The nuts were old ones, lying under last autumn's leaves, and before a large heap had been gathered, aunt Corinne bethought her to examine if they were fit to eat. They were not; for besides an ancient flavor, the first kernel betrayed the fact that these were pig-nuts instead of hickory.

[Illustration: BOBADAY'S NARROW ESCAPE.]

"You would have 'em," said Bobaday, kicking the pile. "I didn't think they's good, anyhow."

"They looked just like our little hickories," said aunt Corinne, twisting her mouth at the acrid kernel, "that used to lay under that tree in the pasture. And their shells are as sound."

But there was compensation in two saplings which submitted to be rode as teeters part of the idle afternoon.

Grandma Padgett had put away the tea things before Zene returned. He brought with him a wagon-maker from one of the villages on the 'pike. The wagon-maker, after examining the disabled vehicle, and getting the dimensions of the other hind wheel which Zene had forgotten to take to him, assured the party he would set them up all right in a day or two.

Grandma Padgett was sitting on a log knitting.

"We'd better have kept to the 'pike," she remarked.

"Yes, marm," responded Zene.

"The toll-gates would be a small expense compared to this."

"Yes, indeed, marm," responded Zene, grimacing piteously.

"Still," said Grandma Padgett, "we have much to be thankful for, in that our lives and health have been spared."

"Oh, yes, marm! yes, marm!" responded Zene.

The wagon-maker hung by one careless leg to his horse before cantering off, and inquired with neighborly interest:

"How far West you folks goin'?"

"We're goin' to Illinois," replied Grandma Padgett.

"Oh, pshaw, now!" said the wagon-maker. "Goin' to the Eeleenoy! that's a good ways. Ain't you 'fraid you'll never git back?"

"We ain't expectin' to come back," said Grandma Padgett. "My son's settled there."

"He has!" said the wagon-maker with an accent of surprise. "Well, well! they say that's an awful country."

"My son writes back it's as fine land as he ever saw," said Grandma Padgett with dignity and proper local pride.

"But the chills is so bad," urged the wagon-maker, who looked as if he had experienced them at their worst. "And the milk-sick, they say the milk-sick is all over the Eeelenoy."

"We're not borrowing any trouble about such things," said Grandma Padgett.

"Some of our townfolks went out there," continued the wagon-maker, "but what was left of 'em come back. They had to buy their drinkin' water, and the winters on them perrares froze the children in their beds! Oh, I wouldn't go to the Eeelenoy," said the wagon-maker coaxingly. "You're better off here, if you only knew it."

As Grandma Padgett heard this remonstrance with silent dignity, the wagon-maker took himself off with a few additional remarks.

Then they began to make themselves snug for the night. The wagon-cover was taken off and made into a tent for Grandma Padgett and aunt Corinne. Robert Day was to sleep in the carriage, and Zene insisted on sleeping with blankets on the wagon where he could watch the goods. He would be within calling distance of the camp.

"We're full as comfortable as we were last night, anyhow," observed the head of the caravan.

Zene said it made no difference about his supper. He took thankfully what was kept for him, and Robert Day felt certain Zene was trying to bestow on him some conscience-stricken glances.

It was an occasion on which Zene could be made to tell a story. He was not lavish with such curious ones as he knew. Robert sometimes suspected him to be a mine of richness, but it took such hard mining to get a nugget out that the results hardly compensated for the effort.

But when the boy climbed upon the wagon in starlight, and made a few leading remarks, Zene really plunged into a story. He thereby relieved his own feelings and turned the talk from late occurrences.

"I told you about Little Ant Red and Big Ant Black?"

"No, you never!" exclaimed Bobaday.

"Well, once there was Little Ant Red and Big Ant Black lived neighbors."

"Whose aunts were they--each other's?" inquired the boy.

"They wasn't your father's or mother's sisters; they was _antymires_," explained Zene.

"Oh," said Robert Day.

"Ant Red, she was a little bit of a thing; you could just see her. But Ant Black, she was a great big critter that went like a train of cars when she was a mind to."

"I don't like either kind," said Robert. "The little ones got into our sugar once, and Grandma had to fight 'em out with camphor, and a big black got into my mouth and I bit him in two. He pinched my tongue awful, and he tasted sour."

"Big Ant Black," continued Zene, "she lived in a hill by a stump, but Little Ant Red she lived on a leaf up a tree."

"I thought they always crept into houses," urged Bobaday.

"This one didn't. She lived on a leaf up a tree. And these two ants run against each other in everything. When they met in the grass they'd stand up on their hind feet and shake hands as friendly as you please, but as soon as their backs was turned they'd talk! Big Ant Black said Little Ant Red was always a meddling, and everybody knowed her son was drowned in under the orchard cider-press where his mother sent him to snuff round. And Little Ant Red she used to tell how Ant Black was so graspin' she tried to carry that cider-press off and hide it in her hole.

"They had all the neighbors takin' sides. There was a yellow-back spider. He took up for Ant Red; he hoped to get a taste of her, and Ant Black he knowed was big enough to bite him unless he was mighty soople in wrappin' the web around her. Every mornin' when the dew stood in beads on his net he told Ant Red they was tears he shed about her troubles, and she run up and down and all around, talkin' like a sawmill, but keepin' just off the web. And there was Old Grasshopper, he sided with Ant Red, and so did Miss Green Katydid. But all the beetles, and them bugs that lived under the bark of the old stump, they took up for Ant Black, 'cause she was handy. And the snake-feeder was on her side.

"Well, it run along, feelin's gittin' harder and harder, till Ant Black she jumped up and kitched Ant Red fussin' round her cow pasture one night, and then the cows began to give bloody milk, and then Ant Black she give out that Ant Red was a witch.

"Now, these kind of critters, they're as smart as human bein's if you only knowed it. And that was enough. The katydid, she said she felt pins and needles in her back whenever Ant Red looked at her; and the snake-feeders said she shot arries at 'em when they was flyin' over a craw-fish hole. All the beetles and wood-bugs complained of

bein' hit with witch-bells, and the more Ant Red acted careful the more they had ag'in her.

"Well, the spider he told her to come into his den and live, and she'd be safe from hangin', but she wasn't sure in her mind about that. Even the grasshopper jumped out of her way, and bunged his eyes out at her; as if she could harm such a great big gray lubber as him! She was gittin' pretty lonesome when she concluded to try a projic."

"What's a projic?" inquired Robert Day.

"Why, it's a--p'pperation, or--a plan of some kind," explained Zene.

"So she invites Big Ant Black and all her family, and the spider and all his family, and the beetles and bugs and all their families, and the snake-feeders and Miss Katydid for young folks, and don't leave out a neighbor, to an apple-bee right inside the orchard fence.

"So it was pleasant weather, and they all come and brung the babies, the old grasshopper skippin' along as nimble and steppin' on the shawl that was wrapped round his young one. And the snake-feeders they helped Miss Katydid over the lowest fence-rail, and here come Big Ant Black with such a string behind her it looked like a funeral instead of a family percession and she twisted her neck from side to side as soon as she see the great big apple, kind of wonderin' if they couldn't carry it off.

"Little Ant Red had all her children's heads combed and the best cheers set out, and she had on her good dress and white apron, and she says right and left, 'Hoddy-do, sir? hoddy-do, marm? Come right in and take cheers. And they all shook hands with her as if they'd never dreamt of callin' her a witch, and fell right on to the apple and begun to eat. And they all e't and e't, till they'd made holes in the rind and hollered it out. And Big Ant Black she gits her family started, and they carries off chunk after chunk of that apple till the road was black and white speckled between her house and the apple-tree.

"Little Ant Red she walks around urgin' them all to help theirselves, and that made them all feel pleasant to her. But Big Ant Black she got so graspin' and eager, that what does she do but try to help her young ones carry off the whole apple-shell. It did look jub'ous to see such a big thing movin' off with such little critters tuggin' it. And then Ant Red got on to a clover-head and showed the rest of the company what Ant Black was a-doin'. Says Ant Red: 'You ain't e't more'n a mouthful, Mr. Grasshopper.'

"No, marm,' says he.

"I s'ze to myself,' says Ant Red, 'here is this polite company, and the snake-feeders don't touch nothin,' and everybody knows Miss Katydid lives on nothin' but rose-leaf butter, and the bugs and beetles will hardly take enough, to keep 'em alive.' 'And I s'ze to

myself,' says Ant Red, 'here's this big apple walkin' off with nobody but Ant Black to move it. This great big sound apple. And it looks to me like witchcraft. That's what it looks like,' says Ant Red.

"They all declared it looked just like witchcraft. Ant Black tried to show them how holler the apple was, and they declared if she'd hollered it that way so quick, it was witchcraft certain.

"So what does they do but pen her and her young ones in the apple-shell and stop it up with mud. Even the mud-wasps and tumble-bugs that hadn't been bid come and took part when they see the dirt a-flyin'. Ant Red set on the clover-head and teetered.

"Now, down to this present minute," concluded Zene, "you never pick up an apple and find a red ant walkin' out of it. If ants is there, it's one of them poor black fellers that was shut up at the apple-bee, and they walk out brisk; as if they's glad to find daylight once more."

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT CAMP MEETING.

Towards evening of the next day the broken wagon wheel was replaced. By that time the children were not more anxious to move forward than was Grandma Padgett. So just before sunset they broke up camp and moved along the country road until the constellations were swinging overhead. Zene took the first good crossway that led to the 'pike, and after waiting to be sure that the noses of Old Hickory and Old Henry were following, he jogged between dewy fence rows, and they came to the broad white ribbon of high road, and in time to the village of Somerford, having progressed only ten miles that day.

Bobaday and Corinne were so sleepy, and their departure from Somerford next morning was taken at such an early hour, that they remembered it only as a smell of tallow candles in the night, accompanied by a landlady's head in a ruffled nightcap.

Very different was Springfield, the county seat of Clark County. That was a town with people moving briskly about it, and long streets could be seen, where pleasant houses were shaded with trees.

Zene inquired the names of all small places as soon as they entered the main street, and then, obligingly halting the wagon at one side, he waited until Grandma Padgett came up, and told her. He learned and announced the cities long before any of them came into view. It was a pleasure to Bobaday and aunt Corinne to ride into a town repeating its name to themselves and trying to fasten its identity on their minds. First they would pass a gang of laborers working on the road, or perhaps a man walking up and down telegraph poles with sharp-shod

heels; then appeared humble houses with children playing thickly around them. Finer buildings crowded on the sight, and where the signs of business flaunted, were women and little children in pretty clothes, always going somewhere to buy something nice. Once they met a long procession of carriages, and in the first carriage aunt Corinne beheld and showed to her nephew a child's coffin made of metal. It glittered in the sun. Grandma Padgett said it was zinc. But aunt Corinne secretly suspected it was made of gold, to enclose some dear little baby whose mother would not put it into anything else.

At New Carlisle, a sleepy little village where the dogfennel was wonderfully advanced for June, Zene took the gray from the wagon and hitched him to the carriage, substituting Old Hickory. The gray's shoulder was rubbed by his collar, and Zene reasoned that the lighter weight of the carriage would give him a better chance of healing his bruise. Thus paired the horses looked comical. Hickory and Henry evidently considered the change a disgrace to them. But they made the best of it and uttered no protest, except keeping as wide a space as possible between themselves and their new mates. But the gray and white, old yoke fellows at the plough, who knew nothing of the dignity of carriage drawing, and cared less, who had rubbed noses and shared feed-boxes ever since they were colts, both lifted up their voices in mournful whinneys and refused comfort and correction. The white turned his head back over his shoulder and would have halted anywhere until his mate came up; while the gray strained forward, shaking his head, and neighing as if his throat were full of tears every time a tree or a turn in the road hid the wagon.

The caravan moving to this irregular and doleful music, passed through another little town which Zene said was named Boston, late on a rainy afternoon. Here they crossed the Miami River in a bridge through the cracks of which Robert Day and Corinne looked at the full but not very wide stream. It flowed beneath them in comparative silence. The rain pricked the water's surface into innumerable puckers.

"Little boys dancing up," said aunt Corinne, in time-honored phrase.

"No; it's bees stingin' the water," said her nephew, "with long stingers that reach clear out of the clouds."

These sky-bees stung the dusty road until it lay first in dark dimples and last in swollen mud rows and shallow pools. The 'pike kept its dignity under the heaviest rains. Its very mud was light and plaster-like, scarcely clinging to the wheels or soiling the horses' legs. Its flint ribs rung more sharply under the horses' shoes. Through the damp dusk aunt Corinne took pleasure in watching the fire struck by old Henry and the gray, against the trickling stones. They pulled the carriage curtains down, and Grandma Padgett had the oilcloth apron drawn up to her chin, while she continued to drive the horses through a slit. The rear of the wagon made a blur ahead of them. Now the 'pike sides faded from fresh green to a general dulness, and trees whispering to the rain lost their vistas and

indentations of shade, and became a solid wall down which a steady pour hissed with settled monotony. Boswell and Johnson no longer foraged at the 'pike sides, or lagged behind or scampered ahead. They knew it was a rainy October night without lightning and thunder, slipped by mistake into the packet of June weather; and they trotted invisibly under the carriage, carrying their tails down, and their lolling tongues close to the puddles they were obliged to scamper through or skip. Boswell and Johnson remembered their experiences at the lonesome Susan house, where they lay in the deep weeds and were forgotten until morning by the harassed family; and they rolled their eyes occasionally, with apprehension lest the grinding of the wheels should cease, and some ghostly wall loom up at one side of their way, unlighted by a single glimmer and unperfumed by any whiff of supper. It was a fine thing to be movers' dogs when the movers went into camp or put up in state at a tavern. Around a camp were all sorts of woodsy creatures to be scratched out of holes or chased up trees, or to be nosed and chewed at. There were stray and half-wild pigs that had tails to be bitten, and what could be more exhilarating than making a drove of grunting pigs canter like a hailstorm away into deep woods! And in the towns and villages all resident dogs came to call on Boswell and Johnson. At every tavern Boswell picked a fight and Johnson fought it out; sometimes retiring with his tail to the earth and a sad expression of being outnumbered, but oftener a victor to have his wounds dressed and bandaged by Boswell's tongue. There was plenty to eat at taverns and camps, and good hunting in the woods; but who could tell what hungry milestone might stand at the end of this day's journey?

Grandma Padgett herself was beginning to feel anxious on this subject. She drove faster in order to overtake Zene and consult with him, but before his attention could be attracted, both carriage and wagon reached a broad belt of shine stretching across the 'pike, and making trees in the meadow opposite stand out as distinct individuals.

This illumination came from many camp-fires extending so far into the woods that the last one showed like a spark. A great collection of moving wagons were ranged in line along the extent of these fires, and tents pitched under the dripping foliage revealed children playing within their snug cover, or women spreading the evening meal. Kettles were hung above the fires, and skillets hissed on the coals. The horses, tied to their feed-boxes, were stamping and grinding their feed in content, and the gray lifted up his voice to neigh at the whole collection as Grandma Padgett stopped just behind Zene. All the camp dogs leaped up the 'pike together, and Boswell and Johnson met them in a neutral way while showing the teeth of defence. To Boswell and Johnson as well as to their betters, this big and well-protected encampment had an inviting look, provided the campers were not to be shunned.

A man came up the 'pike side through the rain and kicked some of the dogs aside.

"Hullo," said he most cheerfully. "Want to put up?"

"What is it?" inquired Zene cautiously. He then craned his neck around to look at Grandma Padgett, whose spectacles glared seriously at the man.

This hospitable traveller wore a red shirt and a slouched hat, and had his trousers tucked in his boots. He pulled off his hat to shake the rain away, and showed bushy hair and a smiling bearded face. No weather could hurt him. He was ready for anything.

"Light down," he exclaimed. "Plenty of room over there if you want it."

"Who's over there?" inquired Zene.

"Oh, it's a big camp-meeting," replied the man. "There's twenty or thirty families, and lots of fun."

"Do you mean," inquired Grandma Padgett, "a camp-meeting for religious purposes?"

"You can have that if you want it," responded the man, "and have your exhorters along. It's a family camp. Most of us going out to Californy. Goin' to cross the plains. Some up in the woods there goin' to Missouri. Don't care where they're goin' if they want to stop and camp with us. _We're_ from the Pan Handle of Virginia. There's a dozen families or more of us goin' out to Californy together. The rest just happened along."

"I'm a Virginian myself," said Grandma Padgett, warming, "though Ohio's been my State for many years."

"Well, now," exclaimed the mover, "if you want to light right down, we'll be all the gladder for that. I saw you stoppin' here uncertain; and there's the ford over Little Miami ahead of you. I thought you'd not like to try it in the dark."

"You're not like a landlord back on the road that let us risk our necks!" said Grandma Padgett with appreciation. "But if you take everybody into camp ain't you afraid of getting the wrong sort?"

"Oh, no," replied the Virginian. "There's enough of _us_ to overpower _them_."

"Well, Zene," said Grandma Padgett, "I guess we'd better stop here. We've provisions in our wagon."

"How far you goin'?" inquired the hospitable mover.

"Into Illinois," replied the head of the small caravan.

"Your trip'll soon be done, then. Come on, now, and go to Californy, why don't you! _That's_ the country to get rich in! You'll see

sights the other side of the Mississippi!"

"I'm too old for such undertakings," said Grandma Padgett, passing over the mover's exuberance with a smile.

"Why, we have a granny over ninety with us!" he declared. "Now's the time to start if you want to see the great western country."

Zene drove off the 'pike on the temporary track made by so many vehicles, and Grandma Padgett followed, the Virginian showing them a good spot near the liveliest part of the camp, upon which they might pitch.

The family sat in the-carriage while Zene took out the horses, sheltered the wagon under thick foliage where rain scarcely penetrated, and stretched the canvas for a tent. Then Grandma Padgett put on her rubber overshoes, pinned a shawl about her and descended; and their fire was soon burning, their kettle was soon boiling, in defiance of water streams which frequently trickled from the leaves and fell on the coals with a hiss. The firelight shone through slices of clear pink ham put down to broil. Aunt Corinne laid the cloth on a box which Zene took out of the wagon for her, and set the cups and saucers, the sugar and preserves, and little seed cakes which grew tenderer the longer you kept them, all in tempting order. They had baker's bread and gingercakes in the carriage. Since her adventure at the Susan house, Grandma Padgett had taken care to put provisions in the carriage pockets. Then aunt Corinne, assisted by her nephew, got potatoes from the sack, wrapped them in wet wads of paper, and roasted them in the ashes. A potato so roasted may be served up with a scorched and hardened shell, but its heart is perfumed by all the odors of the woods. It tastes better than any other potato, and while the butter melts through it you wonder that people do not fire whole fields and bake the crop in hot earth before digging it, to store for winter.

[Illustration: BOBADAY'S CANOPIED THRONE.]

Zene had frequently assured Robert Day that an egg served this way was better still. He said he used to roast eggs in the ashes when burning stumps, and you only needed a little salt with them, to make them fit for a king. But Robert Day scorned the egg and remained true to the potato.

While they were at supper the Virginian's wife came to see them, carrying in her hand an offering of bird-pie. Grandma Padgett responded with a dish of preserves. And they then talked about the old State, trying to discover mutual interests there.

The Virginian's wife was a strong, handsome, cordial woman. Her family came from the Pan Handle, but from the neighborhood of Wheeling, They were not mountaineers. She had six children. They were going to California because her husband had the mining fever. He wanted to go years before, but she held out against it until she saw

he would do no good unless he went. So they sold their land, and started with a colony of neighbors.

The names of all her relatives were sifted, and Grandma Padgett made a like search among her own kindred, and they discovered that an uncle of one, and a grandfather of the other, had been acquainted, and served together in the War of '12. This established a bond. Grandma Padgett was gently excited, and told Bobaday and Corinne after the Virginia woman's departure to her own wagons, that she should feel safe on account of being an old neighbor in the camp.

CHAPTER X.

THE CRY OF A CHILD IN THE NIGHT.

But the camp was too exciting to let the children fall asleep early. Fires were kept briskly burning, and some of the wagoners feeling in a musical humor, shouted songs or hummed melancholy tunes which sounded like a droning accompaniment to the rain. The rain fell with a continuous murmur, and evidently in slender threads, for it scarcely pattered on the tent. It was no beating, boisterous, drenching tempest, but a lullaby rain, bringing out the smell of barks, of pennyroyal and May-apple and wild sweet-williams from the deep woods.

Robert Day crept out of the carriage, having with him the oil-cloth apron and a plan. Four long sticks were not hard to find, or to sharpen with his pocket knife, and a few knocks drove them into the soft earth, two on each side of a log near the fire. He then stretched the oil-cloth over the sticks, tying the corners, and had a canopied throne in the midst of this lively camp. A chunk served for a footstool. Bobaday sat upon his log, hearing the rain slide down, and feeling exceedingly snug. His delight came from that wild instinct with which we all turn to arbors and caves, and to unexpected grapevine bowers deep in the woods; the instinct which makes us love to stand upright inside of hollow sycamore-trees, and pretend that a green tunnel among the hazel or elderberry bushes is the entrance hall of a noble castle.

Bobaday was very still, lest his grandmother in the tent, or Zene in the remoter wagon, should insist on his retiring to his uneasy bed again. He got enough of the carriage in daytime, having counted all its buttons up and down and crosswise. The smell of the leather and lining cloth was mixed with every odor of the journey. One can have too much of a very easy, well-made carriage.

The firelight revealed him in his thoughtful mood: a very white boy with glistening hair and expanding large eyes of a gray and velvet texture. Some light eyes have a thin and sleepy surface like inferior

qualities of lining silk; and you cannot tell whether the expression or the humors of the eye are at fault. But Nature, or his own meditations on what he read and saw in this delicious world, had given to Bobaday's irises a softness like the pile of gray velvet, varied sometimes by cinnamon-colored shades.

His eyes reflected the branches, the other campfires, and many wagons. It gave him the sensation of again reading for the first time one of grandfather's Peter Parley books about the Indians, or Mr. Irving's story of Dolph Heyleger, where Dolph approaches Antony Vander Heyden's camp. He saw the side of one wagon-cover dragged at and a little night-capped head stuck out.

"Bobaday!" whispered aunt Corinne, creeping on tiptoe toward him, and anxious to keep him from exclaiming when he saw her.

"What did you get up for?" he whispered back.

"What did you get up for?" retaliated aunt Corinne.

Robert Day made room for her on the log under the canopy, and she leaned down and laced her shoes after being seated. "Ma Padgett's just as tight asleep! What'd she say if she knew we wasn't in bed!"

It was so exciting and so nearly wicked to be out of bed and prowling when their elders were asleep, they could not possibly enjoy the sin in silence.

"Ain't it nice?" whispered aunt Corinne. "I saw you fixin' this little tent, and then I slip-ped up and hooked some of my clothes on, and didn't dast to breathe 'fear Ma Padgett'd hear me. There must be lots of children in the camp."

"Yes; I've heard the babies cryin'."

"Do you s'pose there's any gipsy folks along?"

"Do 'now," whispered Bobaday, his tone inclining to an admission that gipsy folks might be along.

"The kind that would steal us," explained aunt Corinne.

This mere suggestion was an added pleasure; it made them shiver and look back in the bushes.

"There might be--away back yonder," whispered Robert Day, emboldened by remembering that his capable grandmother was just within the tent, and Zene at easy waking distance.

"But all the people will hitch up and drive away in the morning," he added, "and we won't know anything about 'em."

To aunt Corinne this seemed a great pity. "I'd like to see how

everybody looks," she meditated.

"So'd I," whispered her nephew.

"It's hardly rainin' a drizzle now," whispered aunt Corinne.

"I get so tired ridin' all day long," whispered Robert, "that I wish I was a scout or something, like that old Indian that was named Trackless in the book--that went through the woods and through the woods, and didn't leave any mark and never seemed to wear out. You remember I read you a piece of it?"

Aunt Corinne fidgeted on the log.

"Wouldn't you like," suggested her nephew, whose fancy the nighttime stimulated, "to get on a flying carpet and fly from one place to another?"

Aunt Corinne cast a glance back over her shoulder.

"We could go a little piece from our camp-fire and not get lost," she suggested.

"Well," whispered Robert boldly, "le's do it. Le's take a walk. It won't do any harm. 'Tisn't late."

"The's chickens crowin' away over there."

"Chickens crow all times of the night. Don't you remember how our old roosters used to act on Christmas night? I got out of bed four times once, because I thought it was daylight, they would crow so!"

"Which way'll we take?" whispered aunt Corinne.

Robert slid cautiously from the log and mapped out the expedition.

"Off behind the wagon so's Zene won't see us. And then we'll slip along towards that furthest fire. We can see the others as we go by. Follow me."

It was easy to slip behind the wagon and lose themselves in the brush. But there they stumbled on unseen snags and were caught or scratched by twigs, and descended suddenly to a pig-wallow or other ugly spot, where Corinne fell down. Bobaday then thought it expedient for his aunt to take hold of his jacket behind and walk in his tracks, according to their life-long custom when going down cellar for apples after dark. Grandma Padgett was not a woman to pamper the fear of darkness in her family. She had been known to take a child who recoiled from shapeless visions, and lead him into the unlighted room where he fancied he saw them.

So after proceeding out of sight of their own wagon, aunt Corinne and her nephew, toughened by this training, would not have owned to

each other a wish to go back and sit in safety and peace of nerve again upon the log. Robert plodded carefully ahead, parting the bushes, and she passed through the gaps with his own figure, clinching his jacket with fingers that tightened or relaxed with her tremors.

They had not counted on being smelled out by dogs at the various watch-fires. One lolling yellow beast sprang up and chased them. Aunt Corinne would have flown with screams, but her nephew hushed her up and put her valiantly on a very high stump behind himself. The dog took no trouble to trace them. He was too comfortable before the brands, too mud-splashed and stiff from a long day's journey, to care about chasing any mystery of the wood to its hole. But this warned them not to venture too near other fires where other possible dogs lay sentry.

"Why didn't we fetch old Johnson?" whispered aunt Corinne, after they slid down the tree stump.

"Cause Boswell'd been at his heels, and the whole camp'd been in a fight," replied Bobaday. "Old Johnson was under our wagon; I don't know where Bos was. I was careful not to wake him."

Through gaps in foliage and undergrowth they saw many an individual part of the general camp; the wagon-cover in some cases being as dun as the hide of an elephant. When a curtain was dropped over the front opening of the wagon, Bobaday and Corinne knew that women and children were sleeping within on their chattels. Here a tent was made of sheets and stretched down with the branch of an overhanging tree for a ridge-pole; and there horse-blankets were made into a canopy and supported by upright poles. Within such covers men were asleep, having sacks or comforters for bedding.

On a few wagon tongues, or stretched easily before fires, men lingered, talking in steady, monotonous voices as if telling stories, or in indifferent tones as if tempting each other to trades.

The rain had entirely ceased, though the spongy wet wood sod was not pleasant to walk upon. "I guess," said-aunt Corinne, "we'd better go back."

"Well, we've seen consider'ble," assented her nephew. "I guess we'd better."

So he faced about. But quite near them arose the piercing scream of a child in mortal fear.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DARKENED WAGON.

Aunt Corinne and her nephew felt pierced by the cry. Her hands gripped his jacket with a shock. Robert Day turning took hold of his aunt's wrist to pinch her silent, but his efforts were too zealous and turned her fright to indignation.

"I don't want my hand pinched off, Bobaday Padgett!" whispered aunt Corinne, jerking away and thus breaking the circuit of comfort and protection which was supposed to flow from his jacket.

"But listen," hissed Robert.

"I don't want to listen," whispered aunt Corinne; "I want to go back to our camp-fire."

"Nobody can hurt us," whispered her nephew, gathering boldness. "You stay here and let me creep through the bushes to that wagon. I want to see what it was."

"If you stay a minute I'll go and leave you," remonstrated aunt Corinne. "Ma Padgett don't want us off here by ourselves."

But Robert's hearing was concentrated upon the object toward which he moved. He used Indian-like caution. The balls of his large eyes became so prominent that they shone with some of the lustre of a cat's in the dark.

Corinne took hold of the bushes in his absence.

The wind was breathing sadly through the trees far off. What if some poor little child, lost in the woods, should come patting to her, with all the wildness of its experience hanging around it? Oh, the woods was a good play-house, on sunshiny days, but not the best of homes, after all. That must be why people built houses. When the snow lay in a deep cake, showing only the two thumb-like marks at long intervals made by the rabbit in its leaping flight, and when the air was so tense and cold you could hear the bark of a dog far off, Bobaday used to say he would love to live in the woods all the time. He would chop to keep himself warm. He loved to drag the air into his lungs when it seemed frozen to a solid. Corinne remembered how his cheeks burned and his eyes glittered during any winter exertion. And what could be prettier, he said, than the woods after it sleeted all night, and hoar frost finished the job! Every tree would stand glittering in white powder, as if dressed for the grandest occasion, the twigs tipped with lace-work, and the limbs done in tracery and all sorts of beautiful designs. Still this white dress was deadly cold to handle. Aunt Corinne had often pressed her fingers into the velvet crust upon the trunks. She did not like the winter woods, and hardly more did she like this rain-soaked place, and these broad, treacherous leaves that poured water down her neck in the humid dark.

Bobaday pounced upon her with such force when he appeared once more,

that she was startled into trying to climb a bush no higher than herself.

He had not a word to say, but hitched his aunt to his jacket and drew her away with considerable haste. They floundered over logs and ran against stumps. Their own smouldering fire, and wagon with the hoops standing up like huge uncovered ribs, and the tents wherein their guardian slept after the fatigue of the day, all appeared wonderfully soon, considering the time it had taken them to reach their exploring limit.

Aunt Corinne huddled by the coals, and Bobaday sat down on the foot-chunk he had placed for his awning throne.

"You better go to bed quick as ever you can," he said.

"I guess I ain't goin'," said aunt Corinne with indignant surprise, "till you tell me somethin' about what was up in the bushes. I stayed still and let you look, and now you won't tell me!"

"You heard the sound," remonstrated Robert.

"But I didn't see anything," argued aunt Corinne.

"You wouldn't want to," said Bobaday.

They were talking in cautious tones, but no longer whispering. It had become too tiresome. Aunt Corinne would now have burst out with an exclamation, but checked herself and tilted her nose, talking to the coals which twinkled back to her between her slim fingers.

"Boys think they are so smart! They want to have all the good times and see all the great shows, and go slidin' in winter time, when girls have to stay in the house and knit, and then talk like they's grown up, and we's little babies!"

Robert Day fixed his eyes on his aunt with superior compassion.

"Grandma Padgett wouldn't want me to scare you," he observed.

Corinne edged several inches closer to him. She felt that she must know what her nephew had seen if she had to thread all the dark mazes again and look at it by herself.

"Ma Padgett never 'lows me to act scared," she reminded him. "I always have to go up to what I'm 'fraid of."

"You won't go up to this."

"Maybe I will. Tisn't so far back to that wagon."

"I wouldn't stir it up for considerable," said Robert.

"Was it a lion or a bear? Was it goin' to eat anything? Is that what made the little child cry?"

"The little child hollered 'cause 'twas afraid of it. I was glad you didn't look in at the end of the wagon with me."

Aunt Corinne edged some inches nearer her protector.

"How could you see what was in a dark wagon?"

"There was a candle lighted inside. Aunt Krin, there was a little pretty girl in that wagon that I do believe the folks stole!"

This was like a story. The luxury of a real stolen child had never before come in aunt Corinne's way.

"Why, Bobaday?" she inquired affectionately.

"Because the, little girl seemed like she was dead till all at once she opened her eyes, and then her mouth as if she was going to scream again, and they stopped her mouth up, and covered her in clothes."

"What did the wagon look like?"

"Like a little room. And they slept on the floor. They had tin things hangin' around the sides, and a stove in one corner with the pipe stickin' up through the cover. And the cover was so thick you couldn't see a light through it. You could only see through the pucker-hole where it comes together over the feed-box."

"And how many folks were there?"

"I don't know. I saw them fussing with the little girl, and I saw it, and then I didn't stay any longer."

"What was it, Bobaday?"

"I don't know," he solemnly replied.

"Yes, but what did it look like?"

Her nephew stared doubtfully upon her.

"Will you holler if I tell you?"

Aunt Corinne went through an impressive pantomime of deeding and double-deeding herself not to holler.

"Will you be afraid all the rest of the night?"

No; aunt Corinne intimated that her courage would be revived and strengthened by knowing the worst about that wagon.

He pierced her with his dilating eyes, and beckoned her to put up her ear for the information.

"You ain't goin' to play any trick," remonstrated his relative, "like you did when you got me to say grandmother, grandmother, thith--thith--thith, and then hit my chin and made me bite my tongue?"

Robert was forced to chuckle at the recollection, but he assured aunt Corinne that grandmother, grandmother, thith--thith--thith was far from his thoughts. He hesitated, with aunt Corinne's ear jogging against his chin. Then in a loud whisper he communicated:

"_It_ was a man with a pig's _head on_ him!"

CHAPTER XII.

JONATHAN AND THRUSTY ELLEN.

Aunt Corinne drew back into a rigid attitude. "I don't believe it!" she said.

Robert Day passed over her incredulity with a flickering smile.

"People don't have pigs' heads on them!" argued aunt Corinne. "Did he grunt?"

"And he had a tush stickin' out from his lower jaw," added Robert.

They gazed at each other in silent horror. While this awful pantomime was going on, the flap of Grandma Padgett's tent was lifted, and a voice of command, expressing besides astonishment and alarm, startled their ears with--

"Children!"

Aunt Corinne leaped up and turned at bay, half-expecting to find the man with the pig's head gnashing at her ear. But what she saw in the sinking light was a fine old head in a night-cap, staring at them from the tent. Bobaday and his aunt were so rapid in retiring that their guardian was unable to make them explain their conduct as fully as she desired. They slept so long in the morning that the camp was broken up when Grandma Padgett called them out to breakfast.

[Illustration: THE VIRGINIAN AND HIS CHILDREN.]

Zene wanted the tent of aunt Corinne to stretch over the wagon-hoops. He had already hitched the horses, restoring the gray and the white to their former condition of yoke-fellows, and these two rubbed noses affectionately and had almost as much to whisper to each other as had

Robert and Corinne over their breakfast.

The darkened wagon was nowhere to be seen. Corinne climbed a tall stump as an observatory, and Bobaday went a piece into the bushes, only to find that all that end of the camp was gone. The colony of Virginians was also partly under way.

Aunt Corinne felt a certain sadness steal over her. She had brought herself to admit the pig-headed man, with limitations. He might have a pig's head on him, but it wasn't fast. He did it to frighten children. She had fully intended to see him and be frightened by him at any cost. Now he was gone like a bad dream in the night. And she should not know if the little girl was stolen. She could only revenge herself on Robert Day for having seen into that darkened wagon, with the stove-pipe sticking out when she had not, by sniffing doubtfully at every mysterious allusion to it. They did not mention the pigheaded man to Grandma Padgett, though both longed to know if such a specimen of natural history had ever come under her eyes. She would have questioned then about the walk that led to this discovery. Her prejudices against children's prowling away from their elders after dark were very strong.

Aunt Corinne thought the pig-headed man might have come to their carriage when they were ready to start, instead of the Virginian.

"Right along the pike?" he inquired cheerfully.

"I believe so," said Grandma Padgett.

"You'll be in our company then as far as you go. It'll be better for you to keep in a big company."

"It will indeed," said Grandma Padgett sincerely.

"Oh, you'll keep along to Californy," said the Virginian."

"To the Illinois line," amended Grandma Padgett, at which he laughed, adding:

"Well, we'll neighbor for a while, anyhow."

"Let your little boy and girl ride in our carriage," begged Robert Day, seizing on this relief from monotony.

"Yes do," said his grandmother, turning her glasses upon the little boy and girl. Aunt Corinne had been inspecting them as they stood at their father's heels, and bestowing experimental smiles on them. The boy was a clear brown-eyed fellow with butternut trousers up to his arm-pits, and a wool hat all out of shape. The little girl looked red-faced and precise, the color from her lips having evidently become diluted through her skin. Over a linsey petticoat she wore a calico belted apron. The belt was as broad as the length of aunt Corinne's hand, for in the course of the morning aunt Corinne furtively

measured it. Although it was June weather, this little girl also wore stout shoes and yarn stockings.

"Well, they might get in if they won't crowd you," assented their father. "You're all to take dinner with us, my wife says."

The children were hoisted up the steps, which they climbed with agile feet, as if accustomed to scaling high cart wheels. Bobaday sat by his grandmother, and the back seat received this addition to the party without at all crowding aunt Corinne. She looked the boy and girl over with great satisfaction. They were near her own age.

"Do you play teeter in the woods?" she inquired with a fidget, by way of opening the conversation.

The boy rolled his eyes towards her and replied in a slow drawl, sometimes they did.

Robert Day then put it to him whether he liked moving.

"I like to ride the leaders for fawther," replied the boy.

"What's your name?" inquired aunt Corinne, directing her inquiry to both.

The little girl turned redder, answering in a broad drawl like her brother, "His name's Jonathan and mine's Clar'sy Ellen."

Aunt Corinne looked down at the hind wheel revolving at her side of the carriage, and her lips unconsciously moved in meditation.

"Thrusty Ellen!" she repeated aloud.

"Clar'sy Ellen," corrected the little girl, her broad drawl still confusing the sound.

Aunt Corinne's lips continued to move. She whispered to the hind wheel, "Mercy! If I was named Jonathan and Thrusty Ellen, I'd wish my folks'd forgot to name me at all!"

CHAPTER XIII.

FAIRY CARRIE AND THE PIG-HEADED MAN.

Little Miami river was crossed without mishap, and the Padgetts and Breakaways took dinner together.

Robert Day could not help noticing the difference between his grandmother's wagon and the wagons of the Virginians. Their wagon-beds

were built almost in the shape of the crescent moon, bending down in the centre and standing high at the ends, and they appeared half as long again as the Ohio vehicle. The covers were full of innumerable ribs, and the puckered end was drawn into innumerable puckers.

The children took their dinners to the yellow top of a brand-new stump which, looked as if somebody had smoothed every sweet-smelling ring clean on purpose for a picnic table. Some branches of the felled tree were near enough to make teeter seats for Corinne and Thrusty Ellen. Jonathan and Robert stood up or kneeled against the arching roots. Dinner taken from the top of a stump has the sap of out-door enjoyment in it; and if you have to scare away an ant, or a pop-eyed grasshopper thuds into the middle of a plate, you still feel kindly towards these wild things for dropping in so sociably.

Jonathan and Thrusty Ellen were rather silent, but such remarks as they made were solid information.

"You don't know wher' my fawther's got his money," said Jonathan.

This was stated so much like a dare that Robert yearned to retort that he did know, too. As he did not know, the next best thing was to pretend it was no consequence anyhow, and find out as quickly as possible; therefore Robert Day said:

"Ho! Maybe he hasn't any."

"He has more gold pieces 'n ever you seen," proceeded Jonathan weightily.

"Then why don't he give you some?" exclaimed aunt Corinne with a wriggle. "I had a gold dollar, but I b'lieve that little old man with a bag on his back stole it."

Jonathan and Thrusty Ellen made round eyes at a young damsel who had been trusted with gold.

[Illustration]

"My fawther calls 'em yeller boys," said Jonathan. "He carries 'em and his paper money in a belt fastened round his waist under all his clothes."

"You don't ought to tell," said Thrusty Ellen. "Father said we shouldn't talk about it."

"_He_ won't steal it," said Jonathan, indicating Robert with his thumb. "_She_ won't neither," indicating aunt Corinne.

Aunt Corinne with some sharpness assured the Virginia children that her nephew and herself were indeed above such suspicion; that Ma Padgett and brother Tip had the most money, and even Zene was well provided with dollars; while they had silver spoons among their goods

that Ma-Padgett said had been in the family more than fifty years!

Jonathan and Thrusty Ellen accepted this information with much stolidity. The grandeur of having old silver made no impression on them. They saw that Grandma Padgett had one pair of horses hitched to her moving-wagon instead of three pairs, and they secretly rated her resources by this fact.

It was very cheerful moving in this long caravan. When there was a bend in the 'pike, and the line of vehicles curved around it, the sight was exhilarating.

Some of the Virginians sat on their horses to drive. There was singing, and calling back and forth. And when they passed a toll-gate, all the tollkeeper's family and neighbors came out to see the array. Jonathan and Robert rode in his father's easiest wagon, while Thrusty Ellen, and her mother enjoyed Grandma Padgett's company in the carriage. As they neared Richmond, which lay just within the Indiana line, men went ahead like scouts to secure accommodations for the caravan. At Louisburg, the last of the Ohio villages, aunt Corinne was watching for the boundary of the State. She fancied it stretched like a telegraph wire from pole to pole, only near the ground, so the cattle of one State could not stray into the other, and so little children could have it to talk across, resting their chins on the cord. But when they came to the line and crossed it there was not even a mark on the ground; not so much as a furrow such as Zene made planting corn. And at first Indiana looked just like Ohio. Later, however, aunt Corinne felt a difference in the States. Ohio had many ups and downs; many hillsides full of grain basking in the sun. The woods of Indiana ran to moss, and sometimes descended to bogginess, and broad-leaved paw-paw bushes crowded the shade; mighty sycamores blotched with white, leaned over the streams: there was a dreamy influence in the June air, and pale blue curtains of mist hung over distances.

But at Richmond aunt Corinne and her nephew, both felt particularly wide awake. They considered it the finest place they had seen since the capital of Ohio. The people wore quaint, but handsome clothes. They saw Quaker bonnets and broad-brimmed hats. Richmond is yet called the Quaker city of Indiana. But what Robert Day and Corinne noticed particularly was the array of wagons moved from street to street, was an open square such as most Western towns had at that date for farmers to unhitch their teams in, and in that open square a closely covered wagon connected with a tent. It was nearly dark. But at the tent entrance a tin torch stuck in the ground showed letters and pictures on the tent, proclaiming that the only pig-headed man in America was therein exhibiting himself and his accomplishments, attended by Fairy Carrie, the wonderful child vocalist.

Before Bobaday had made out half the words, he telegraphed a message to aunt Corinne, by leaning far out of the Brockaway wagon and lifting his finger. Aunt Corinne was leaning out of the carriage, and saw him, and she not only lifted her finger, but violently wagged her head.

The caravan scouts had not been able to find lodging for all the troops, and there was a great deal of dissatisfaction about the rates asked by the taverns. So many of the wagons wound on to camp at the other side of the town, the Brockaways among them. But the neighborly Virginian, in exchanging Robert for his wife and daughter at the carriage door, assured Grandma Padgett he would ride back to her lodging-place next morning and pilot her into the party again.

"I thank you kindly," said Grandma Padgett in old-fashioned phrase. "It's growing risky for me to sleep too much in the open night air. At my age folks must favor themselves, and I'd like a bed to-night, if it is a tavern bed, and a set, table, if the vittles are tavern vittles. And we can stir out early."

So Thrusty Ellen and Jonathan rode away with their father, unconscious of Robert and Corinne's superior feeling in stopping at a tavern.

In the tavern parlor were a lot of sumptuous paper flowers under a glass case. There were a great many stairs to climb, and a gong was sounded for supper.

After supper Grandma Padgett made Zene take her into the stable-yard, that she might carry from the wagon some valuables which thieves in a town would be tempted to steal.

It was about this time that Corinne and Robert Day strayed down the front steps, consulted together and ventured down the street, came back, and ventured again to the next corner.

"He gave us the slip before," said Robert, "but I'd like to get a good look at him for once."

"Would you da'st to spend your gold dollar, though," said aunt Corinne.

"Well, that's better than losin' it," he responded.

It seemed very much better in aunt Corinne's eyes.

"We can just run down there, and run right back after we go in, while Ma Padgett is busy."

"Then we'll have to be spry," said Robert Day.

Having passed the first corner they were spry, springing along the streets with their hands locked. It was not hard to find one's way about in Richmond then, and the tavern was not far from the open square. They came upon the tent, the smoky tin torch, the crowd of idlers, and a loud-voiced youth who now stood at the entrance shouting the attractions within.

Robert dragged his aunt impetuously to the tent door and offered his gold dollar to the shouter.

"Pass right in, gentlemen and ladies," said the ill-looking youth in his monotonous yell, bustling as if he had a rush of business, "and make room for the crowd, all anxious to see the only pig-headed man in America, and to hear the wonderful warblings of Fairy Carrie, the child vocalist. Admission fixed at the low figure of fifteen cents per head," said the ill-looking youth, dropping change into Robert's hand and hustling him upon the heels of Corinne who craned her neck toward the inner canvas. "Only fifteen cents, gentlemen, and the last opportunity to see the pig-headed man who alone is worth the price of admission, and has been exhibited to all the crowned heads of Europe. Fifteen cents. Five three cent pieces only. Fairy Carrie, the wonderful child vocalist, and the only living pig-headed man standing between the heavens and earth to-day."

But when aunt Corinne had reached the interior of the tent, she turned like a flash, clutched Robert Day, and hid her eyes against him. A number of people standing, or seated on benches, were watching the performances on a platform at one end of the tent.

"He won't hurt you," whispered Robert.

"Go 'way!" whispered aunt Corinne, trembling as if she would drive the mere image from her thoughts.

"It's the very thing I saw at the camp," whispered Robert.

"Le's go out again."

"I want my money's worth," remonstrated Robert in an injured tone. "And now he's pickin' up his things and going behind a curtain. Ain't he ugly! I wonder how it feels to look that way? Why don't you stand up straight and act right! Folks'll notice you. I thought you wanted to see him so bad!"

"I got enough," responded aunt Corinne. "But there comes the little girl. And it's the little girl I saw in the wagon. Ain't she pretty!"

[Illustration]

"She ain't got a pig's head, has she?" demanded aunt Corinne.

"She's the prettiest little girl I ever saw," responded Robert impatiently. "I guess if she sees you she'll think, you're sheep-headed. You catch me spendin' gold dollars to take you to shows any more!"

The shrill treble of a little child began a ballad at that time very popular, and called "Lilly Dale." Aunt Corinne faced about and saw a tiny creature, waxen-faced and with small white hands, and feet in bits of slippers, standing in a dirty spangled dress which was made to fluff out from her and give her an airy look. Her long brown curls

hung about her shoulders. But her black eyes were surrounded with brownish rings which gave her a look of singing in her sleep, or in a half-conscious state. She was a delicate little being, and as she sung before the staring people, her chin creased and the corners of her mouth quivered as if she would break into sobs if she only dared. Her song was accompanied by a hand-organ ground behind the scenes; and when she had finished and run behind the curtain, she was pushed out again in response to the hand-clapping.

Robert Day hung entranced on this performance. But when Fairy Carrie had sung her second song and disappeared, he took hold of his aunt's ear and whispered cautiously therein:

"I know the pig-headed man stole that little girl."

Aunt Corinne looked at him with solemn assent. Then there were signs of the pig-headed man's returning to the gaze of the public. Aunt Corinne at once grasped her nephew's elbow and pushed him from the sight. They went outside where the ill-looking youth was still shouting, and were crowded back against the wagon by a group now beginning to struggle in.

Robert proposed that they walk all around the outside, and try to catch another glimpse of Fairy Carrie.

They walked behind the wagon. A surly dog chained under it snapped out at them. Aunt Corinne said she should like to see Fairy Carrie again, but Ma Padgett would be looking for them.

At this instant the little creature appeared back of the tent. Whether she had crept under the canvas or knew some outlet to the air, she stood there fanning herself with her hands, and looking up and about with an expression which was sad through all the dusk.

Corinne and Robert Day approached on tiptoe. Fairy Carrie continued to fan herself with her fingers, and looked at them with a dull gaze.

"Say!" whispered aunt Corinne, indicating the interior of the tent, "is he your pa?"

Fairy Carrie shook her head.

"Is your ma in there?"

Fairy Carrie again shook her head, and her face creased as if she were now determined in this open air and childish company to cry and be relieved.

"Can't you talk?" whispered aunt Corinne.

"No," said the child.

"Yes, you can, too! Did the show folks steal you?"

Fairy Carrie's eyes widened. Tears gathered and dropped slowly down her cheeks.

Aunt Corinne seized her hand. "Why, Bobaday, Padgett! You just feel how cold her fingers are!"

Robert did so, and shook his head to indicate that he found even her fingers in a pitiable condition.

"You come with us to Ma Padgett," exhorted aunt Corinne in an excited whisper. "I wouldn't stay where that pig-man is for the world."

The dog under the wagon was growling.

"If the pig-man stole you, Ma Padgett will have him put in jail."

"Let's go back this way, so they won't catch her," cautioned Bobaday.

The dog began to bark.

Robert and Corinne moved away with the docile little child between them. At the barking of the dog one or two other figures appeared behind the tent. Fairy Carrie in her spangled dress was running between Robert and Corinne into the dark.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEARCHING.

But Grandma Padgett did not enjoy the tavern bed or the tavern breakfast. She passed the evening until midnight searching the streets of Richmond, accompanied by Zene and his limp. Some of the tavern people had seen her children in front of the house, but the longest search failed to bring to light any trace of them in or about that building. The tavern-keeper interested himself; the chamber maids were sympathetic. Two hostlers and a bartender went different ways through the town making inquiries. The landlady thought the children might have wandered off to the movers' encampment, where there were other children to play with. Grandma Padgett bade Zene put himself on one of the carriage horses and post to camp. When he came back he reported that Thrusty Ellen and Jonathan were asleep in the tents, and nobody had seen Robert and Corinne.

While searching the streets earlier in the evening, Grandma Padgett observed the pig-headed man's pavilion, and this she also explored with Zene. A crowd was making the canvas stifling, and the pig-headed man's performances were being varied by an untidy woman who screamed and played on a portable bellows which had ivory keys, after

explaining that Fairy Carrie, the Wonderful Musical Child, had been taken suddenly ill and could appear no more that night.

Grandma Padgett remained only long enough to scan twice over every face in the tent. She went out, telling Zene she was at her wits' end.

"Oh, they ain't gone far, marm," reassured Zene. "You'll find out they'll come back to the tavern all right; mebby before we get there."

But every such hopeful return to base disheartened the searchers more. At last the grandmother was obliged to lie down.

Early in the morning the Virginian came, full of concern. His party was breaking camp, but he would stay behind and help search for the children.

"That I won't allow," said Grandma Padgett. "You're on a long road, and you don't want to risk separating from the colony. Besides no one can do more than we can--unless it was Son Tip. As I laid awake, I wished in my heart Son Tip was here."

"Can't you send him a lightnin' message?" said the Virginian. "By the telegraphic wire," he explained, quoting a line of a popular song.

"I wish I could," said Grandma Padgett, "but there's no telegraph office in miles of where he's located. I thought of it last night. There's no way to reach him that I can see, but by letter, and sometimes _they_ lay over on the road. And I don't allow to stop at this place. I'm goin' to set out and hunt in all directions till I find the children."

The Virginian agreed that her plan was best. He also made arrangements to ride back and tell her if the caravan overtook them on the 'pike during that day's journey. Then he and Grandma Padgett shook hands with each other and reluctantly separated.

She made inquiries about all the other roads leading out of Richmond. Zene drove the carriage out of the barnyard, and Grandma Padgett, having closed her account with the tavern, took the lines, an object of interest and solicitude to all who saw her depart, and turned Old Hickory and Old Henry on a southward track. Zene followed with the wagon; he was on no account to loiter out of speaking distance. The usual order of the march being thus reversed, both vehicles moved along lonesomely. Even Boswell and Johnson scented misfortune in the air. Johnson ran in an undeviating line under the carriage, as if he wished his mistress to know he was right there where she could depend on him. His countenance expressed not only gravity, but real concern. Boswell, on the other hand, was in a state of nerves. If he saw a bank at the roadside he ran ahead and mounted it, looking back into the carriage, demanding to know, with a yelping howl, where Bobaday and Corinne were. When his feelings became too strong for him he jumped at the step, and Grandma Padgett shook her head at him.

"Use your nose, you silly little fice, and track them, why don't you?"

As soon as Boswell understood this reproach he jumped a fence and smelt every stump or tuft of grass, every bush and hummock, until the carriage dwindled in the distance. Then he made the dust smoke under his feet as a sudden June shower will do for a few seconds, and usually overtook the carriage with all of his tongue unfurled and his lungs working like a furnace. Johnson reproved him with a glance, and he at once dropped his tail and trotted beside Johnson, as if throwing himself on that superior dog for support in the hour of affliction.

At noon no trace of Robert and Corinne had been seen. Grandma Padgett halted, and when Zene came up she said:

"We'll eat a cold bite right here by the road, and then go on until sunset. If we don't find them, we'll turn back to town and take another direction."

They ate a cold bite, brought ready packed from the Richmond tavern. The horses were given scant time for feeding, and drank wherever they could find water along the road.

Cloudless as the day was, Grandma Padgett's spectacles had never made any landscape look as blue as this one which she followed until sunset. Sometimes it was blurred by a mist, but she wiped it off the glasses.

At sunset they had not seen a track which might be taken for Robert or Corinne's. The grasshoppers were lonesome. There was a great void in the air, and the most tuneful birds complained from the fence-rails. Grandma Padgett constantly polished her glasses on the backward road.

Nothing was said about making a halt for supper or any kind of cold bite. The carriage was silently turned as one half the sun stood above the tree-tops, and it passed the wagon without other sign. The wagon turned as silently. The shrill meadow insects became more and more audible. Some young calves in a field, remembering that it was milking time, began to call their mothers, and to remonstrate at the bars in voices full of sad cadences. The very farmhouse dogs, full-fed, and almost too lazy to come out of the gates to interview Boswell and Johnson, barked as if there was sickness in their respective families and it was all they could do to keep up their spirits and refrain from howling.

The carriage and wagon jogged along until the horizon rim was all of that indescribable tint that evening mixes with saffron, purple and pink. Grandma Padgett became anxious to reach Richmond again. The Virginian might have returned over the road with news of her children. Or the children themselves might be at the tavern waiting for her. Zene drove close behind her, and when they were about to recross a shallow creek, scooped between two easy swells and floating

a good deal of wild grapevine and darkly reflecting many sycamores, he came forward and loosened the check-reins of Hickory and Henry to let them drink. Grandma Padgett felt impatient at any delay.

"I don't think they want water, Zene," said she.

"They'd better cool their mouths, marm," he said. But still he fingered the check reins, uncertain how to state what had sent him forward.

"Seems like I heard somebody laugh, marm," said Zene.

"Well, suppose you did," said Grandma Padgett. "The whole world won't mourn just because we're in trouble."

"But it sounded like Corinne," said Zene uncertainly.

Grandma Padgett's glasses glared upon him.

"You'd' be more apt to hear her crying," she exclaimed. "When did you hear it?"

"Just now. I jumped right off the load."

Hickory and Henry, anxious to taste the creek, would have moved forward, but were checked by both pairs of hands.

"What direction?"

"I don't feel certain, marm," said Zene, "but it come like it was from that way through the woods."

Grandma Padgett stretched her neck out of the carriage toward the right.

"Is that a sled track?" she inquired. "It's gittin' so dim I can't see."

Zene said there was a sled track, pointing out what looked like a double footpath with a growth of grass and shrubs along the centre.

"We'll drive in that way," she at once decided, "and if we get wedged among the trees, we'll have to get out the best way we can."

Zene turned the gray and white, and led on this new march. Hickory and Henry, backed from the creek without being allowed to dip their mouths, reluctantly thumped the sled track with their shoes, and pretended to distrust every tall stump and every glaring sycamore limb which rose before their sight. Scrubby bushes scraped the bottom of the carriage bed. Now one front wheel rose high over a chunk, and the vehicle rolled and creaked. Zene's wagon cover, like a big white blur, moved steadily in front, and presently Hickory and Henry ran their noses against it, and seemed to relish the knock which the

carriage-pole gave the feed-box. Zene had halted to listen.

It was dark in the woods. A rustle could be heard now and then as of some tiny four-footed creature moving the stiff grass; or a twig cracked. The frogs in the creek were tuning their bass-viol. A tree-toad rattled on some unseen trunk, and the whole woods heaved its great lungs in the steady breathing which it never leaves off, but which becomes a roar and a wheeze in stormy or winter weather.

"There isn't anything"--began Grandma Padgett, but between thing and "here" came the distinct laugh of a child.

[Illustration: "WHERE'S BOBADAY?"]

Zene cracked his whip over the gray and the white, and the wagon rumbled ahead rapidly, jarring against roots, and ends of decayed logs, turning short in one direction, and dipping through a long sheltered mud-hole to the very wheel-hubs, brushing against trees and under low branches until guttural remonstrances were scraped out of the cover, and finally descending into an abrupt hollow, with the carriage rattling at its hind wheels.

Grandma Padgett had been through many experiences, but she felt she could truly say to her descendants that she never gave up so entirely for pure joy in her life as when she saw Robert and Corinne sitting in front of a fire built against a great stump, and talking with a fat, silly-looking man who leaned against a cart-wheel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SPROUTING.

"Why, Bobaday Padgett," exclaimed aunt Corinne, "if there isn't our wagon--and Ma Padgett."

Both children came running to the carriage steps, and their guardian got down, trembling. She put her arms around them, and after a silent hug, shook one in each hand.

The fire illuminated wagon and carriage, J. D. Matthew's cart, and the logs and bushes surrounding them. It flickered on the blue spectacles and gave Grandma Padgett a piercing expression while she examined her culprits.

"Where have you been, while Zene and I hunted up and down in such distress?"

"We's going right back to the tavern soon's he could get us there," Robert hastened to explain. "It's that funny fellow, J. D., Grandma.

But he thought we better go roundabout, so they wouldn't catch us."

Zene, limping down from his wagon, listened to this lucid statement.

"O Zene," exclaimed aunt Corinne, "I'm so glad you and Ma Padgett have come! But we knew you wouldn't go on to Brother Tip's without us. Bobaday said you'd wait till we got back, and we ran right straight out of town."

"You ought to be well sprouted, both of you," said Grandma Padgett, still trembling as she advanced toward the fire. "Robert Day, break me a switch; break me a good one, and peel the leaves off. So you came across this man again, and he persuaded you to run away with him, did he?"

J. D. Matthews, who had stood up smiling his widest, now moved around to the other side of his cart and crouched in alarm.

Grandma Padgett now saw that the cart was standing level and open, and within it there appeared a nest of brown curls and one slim, babyish hand.

"What's that?" she inquired.

"Why, don't you see, Grandma?" exclaimed Robert, "that's Fairy Carrie that we ran away with. They made her sing at the show. We just went in a minute to see the pig-headed man. I had my gold dollar. And she felt so awful. And we saw her behind the tent."

"She cried, Ma Padgett," burst in aunt Corinne, "like her heart was broke, and she couldn't talk at all. Then they were coming out to make her go in again, and we said didn't she want to go to you? You wouldn't let her live with a pig-headed man and have to sing. And she wanted to go, so they came out. And we took hold of her hands and ran. And they chased us. And we couldn't go to the tavern 'cause they chased us the other way: it got dark, and when Bobaday hid us under a house, they chased past us, and we waited, oh! the longest time."

"And then," continued Robert, "when we came out, we didn't know which way to go to the tavern, but started roundabout, through fields and over fences, and all, so the show people wouldn't see us. Aunt Corinne was scared. And we stumbled over cows, and dogs barked at us. But we went on till after 'while just as we's slippin' up a back street we met J. D. and the cart, and he was so good! He put the poor little girl in the cart and pushed her. She was so weak she fell down every little bit when we's runnin'. Aunt Corinne and me had to nearly carry her."

"Well, why didn't he bring you back to the tavern?"

"Grandma, if he had, the show people would been sure to get her! We thought they'd travel on this morning. And we were so tired! He took us to a cabin house, and the woman was real good. The man was real

good, too. They had lots of dogs. We got our breakfast and stayed all night. They knew we'd strayed off, but they said J. D. would get us back safe. I gave them the rest of my dollar. Then this morning we all started to town, but J. D. had to go away down the road first, for some eggs and things. And it took us so long we only got this far when it came dusk."

"J. D. took good care of us," said aunt Corinne. "Everybody knows him, and he is so funny. The folks say he travels along the pike all through Indiana and Ohio."

"Well, I'm obliged to him," said Grandma Padgett, still severely; "we owe him, too, for a good supper and breakfast he gave us the other time we saw him. But I can't make out how he can foot it faster than we can ride, and so git into this State ahead of us."

Mr. Matthews now came forward, and straightening his bear-like figure, proceeded to smile without apprehension. He cleared his voice and chanted:

Sometimes I take the wings of steam,
And on the cars my cart I wheel.
And so I came to Richmond town
Two days ago in fair renown.

"Oh," said Grandma Padgett.

"What's that he's givin' out, marm?" inquired Zene.

"It's a way he has," she explained. "He talks in verses. This is the pedler that stayed over in that old house with us, near by the Dutch landlord and the deep creek. Were you going to camp here all night?" she inquired of J. D.

"We wanted him to," coaxed aunt Corinne, "my feet ached so bad. Then we could walk right into town in the morning, and he'd hide Fairy Carrie in his cart till we got to the tavern."

"Zene," said Grandma Padgett, "you might as well take out the horses and feed them. They haven't had much chance to-day."

"Will we stay here, marm?"

"I'll see," said Grandma Padgett. "Anyhow, I can't stand it in the carriage again right away."

"Let's camp here," urged Robert. "J. D.'s got chicken all dressed to broil on the coals, and lots of good things to eat."

"He wouldn't have any money the last time, and I can't have such doings again. I'm hungry, for I haven't enjoyed a meal since yesterday. Mister, see here," said Grandma Padgett, approaching the cart.

J. D. moved backwards as she came as if pushed by an invisible pole carried in the brisk grandmother's hands.

"Stand still, do," she urged, laying a bank bill on his cart. She, snapped her steel purse shut again, put it in her dress pocket, and indicated the bill with one finger. "I don't lay this here for your kindness to the children, you understand. You've got feelings, and know I'm more than obliged. But here are a lot of us, and you buy your provisions, so if you'll let us pay you for some, we'll eat and be thankful. Take the money and put it away."

Thus commanded, J. D. returned cautiously to the other side of the cart, took the money and thrust it into his vest pocket without looking at it. He then smiled again at Grandma Padgett, as if the thought of propitiating her was uppermost in his mind.

"Now go on with your chicken-broiling," she concluded, and he went on with it, keeping at a distance from her while she stood by the cart or when she sat down on a log by the fire.

"Here's your stick, Grandma," said Robert Day, offering her a limb of paw paw, stripped of all its leaves.

Grandma Padgett took it in her hands, reduced its length and tried its limberness.

"If I had given my family such trouble when I's your age," she said to Corinne and Robert, "I should have been sprouted as I deserved."

They listened respectfully.

"Folks didn't allow their children to run wild then. They whipped them and kept them in bounds. I remember once father whipped brother Thomas for telling a falsehood, and made welts on his body."

Corinne and Robert had heard this tale before, but their countenances, put on a piteous expression.

"You ought to have a sprouting," concluded their guardian as if she did not know how to compromise with her conscience, "but since you meant to do a good turn instead of a bad one"--

"Oh, we never intended to run away, Grandma, and worry you so," insisted Robert.

"We's just sorry for the little girl," murmured aunt Corinne.--"Why, I'll let it pass this time. Only never let me know you to do such a thing again." The paw paw sprout fell to the ground, unwarped by use. Corinne and Robert were hearty in promising never to run away with Fairy Carrie or any other party again.

This serious business completed, the grandmother turned her

attention to the child in the cart.

"How sound asleep the little thing is," she observed, smoothing Fairy Carrie's cheek from dark eye-circle to chin, "and her flesh so cold!"

"She's just slept that way ever since J. D. put her in his cart!" exclaimed aunt Corinne. "We made her open her eyes and take some breakfast in her mouth, but she went to sleep again while she's eatin'."

"And we let her sleep ever since," added Bobaday. "It didn't make a bit of difference whether the cart went jolt-erty-jolt over stones or run smooth in the dust. And we shaded her face with bushes."

"She's not well," said their experienced elder. "The poor little thing may have some catching disease! It's a pretty face. I wonder whose child she is? You oughtn't to set up your judgment and carry a little child off with you from her friends. I hardly know what we'll do about it."

"Oh, but they wern't her friends, Ma Padgett," asserted aunt Corinne solemnly. "She isn't the pig-headed man's little girl. Nor any of them ain't her folks. Bobaday thinks they stole her away."

"If she'd only wake up and talk," said Robert, "maybe she could tell us where she lives. But she was afraid of the show people."

"I should think that was likely," said Grandma Padgett.

In the heat of his sympathy, he confided to his grandmother what he had seen of the darkened wagon the night they met the Virginians at the large camp.

The paw paw stick had been laid upon the fire. It blackened frowningly. But Robert and Corinne had known many an apple sprout to preach them such a discourse as it had done, without enforcing the subject matter more heavily.

Grandma Padgett reported that she had searched for her missing family in the show tent, though she could not see why any sensible boy or girl would want to enter such a place. And it was clear to her the child might be afraid of such creatures, and very probable that she did not belong to them by ties of blood. But they might prove her lawful guardians and cause a small moving party a great deal of trouble. "But we won't let them find her again," said aunt Corinne. "Ma, mayn't I keep her for my little sister?--and Bobaday would like to have another aunt."

"Then we'd be stealing her," said Grandma Padgett. "If she's a lost child she ought to be restored to her people, and travelling along the 'pike we can't keep the showmen from finding her."

Bobaday and Corinne gazed pensively at the stump fire, wondering how grown folks always saw the difficulties in doing what you want to do.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MINSTREL.

J. D. Matthews spread his supper upon a log. He had delicacies which created a very cheerful feeling in the party, such as always rises around the thanksgiving board.

Zene sat at one side of the log by J. D. Matthews. Opposite them the grandmother and her children, camped on chunks covered with shawls and horse-blankets. Seeing what an accomplished cook this singular pedler was, how much at home he appeared in the woods, and what a museum he could make of his cart, Zene respectfully kept from laughing at him, except in an indulgent way as the children did.

"I guess we'll stay just where we are until morning," said Grandma Padgett. "The night's pleasant and warm, and there are just as few mosquitoes here as in the tavern. I didn't sleep last night." She felt stimulated by the tea, and sufficiently recovered from the languor which follows extreme anxiety, to linger up watching the fire, allowing the children to linger also, while J. D. Matthews put his cupboard to rights after supper.

It was funny to see his fat hands dabbling in dishwater; he laughed as much about--it as aunt Corinne did.

Grandma Padgett removed the sleeping child from his cart, and after trying vainly to make her eat or arouse herself, put her in the bed in the tent, attired in one of aunt Corinne's gowns.

"She was just as helpless as a young baby," said Grandma Padgett, sitting down again by the fire. "I'll have a doctor look at that child when we go through Richmond. She acts like she'd been drugged."

J. D. Matthews having finished--his dishwashing, sat down in the shadow some distance from the outspoken woman in spectacles, and her family.

"Now come up here," urged aunt Corinne, "and sing it all over--what you was singing before Ma Padgett came."

J. D. ducked his head and chuckled, but remained in his shadow.

"Awh--come on," urged Robert Day "Zene'll sing 'Barb'ry Allen' if you'll sing your song again."

Zene glanced uneasily at Grandma Padgett, and said he must look at the horses. "Barb'ry Allen" was a ballad he had indulged the children with when at a distance from her ears.

But the tea and the hour, and her Virginia memories through which that old sing-song ran like the murmur of bees, made Grandma Padgett propitious, and she laid her gracious commands on Zene first, and J. D. Matthews afterwards. So that not only "Barb'ry Allen" was sung, but J. D.'s ditty, into which he plunged with nasal twanging and much personal enjoyment.

"It's why he didn't ever get married," explained aunt Corinne, constituting herself prologue.

"I should think he needn't make any excuses for that," remarked Grandma Padgett, smiling.

J. D. sawed back and forth on a log, his silly face rosy with pleasure over the tale of his own woes:

O, I went to a friend's house,
The friend says "Come in.
Take a hot cup of coffee,
O where have you been?"

It's down to the Squi-er's
With a license I went,
And my good Sunday clothes on,
To marry intent.

"O where is the lady?"
The good Squi-er, says he.
"O she's gone with a wed'wer
That is not poor J. D."

"It's now you surprise me,"
The friend says a-sigh'n,
"J. D. Matthews not married,
The sun will not shine!"

"Well, I think she was simple!" exclaimed aunt Corinne in epilogue, "when she might have had a man that washed the dishes and talked poetry all the time."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOUSE WITH LOG STEPS.

Richmond must soon have seemed far behind Grandma Padgett's little

caravan, had not Fairy Carrie still drowsed in the carriage, keeping the Richmond adventures always present.

They had parted from J. D. Matthews and the Virginian and his troop. Jonathan and Thrusty Ellen were somewhere on the road ahead, but at a point unknown to Robert and Corinne. They might turn off towards the southwest if all the emigrants agreed to forsake the St. Louis route. No one could tell where J. D. might be rattling his cart.

The afternoon which finally placed Richmond in diminishing perspective, Robert rode with Zene and lived his campaign over again. This was partly necessary because little Carrie lay on the back carriage-seat. But it was entirely agreeable, for Zene wanted to know all the particulars, and showed a flattering, not to say a stimulating anxiety to get a good straight look at Bobaday's prowess in rescuing the distressed. Said Zene:

"But what if her folks never turn up?"

"Then my pa will take her to live with us," said Robert Day, "and Grandma Padgett will do by her just as she does by aunt Krin and me. She isn't a very lively little girl. I'd hate to play Blind Man with her to be blinded; for seems as if she'd just stand against the wall and go to sleep. But it'll be a good thing to have one still child about the house: aunt Corinne fidgets so. I believe, though, her folks are hunting her. Look what a fuss there was about us! When people's children get lost or stolen, they hunt and hunt, and don't give it up."

In the carriage, aunt Corinne sitting by her mother, turned her head at every fifth revolution of the wheels, to see how the strange little girl fared.

"Do you s'pose she will ever be clear awake, Ma Padgett?" inquired, aunt Corinne.

"She'll drowse it off by and by," replied Ma Padgett. "The rubbing I give her this morning, and the stuff the Richmond doctor made her swallow, will bring her out right."

"She's so pretty," mused aunt Corinne. "I'd like to have her hair if she never wanted it any more."

"That's a covetous spirit. But it puts me in mind," said Grandma Padgett, smiling, "of my sister Adeline and the way she took to get doll's hair."

Aunt Corinne had often heard of sister Adeline and the doll's hair, but she was glad to hear the brief tale told again in the pleasant drowsing afternoon.

The Indiana landscape was beautiful in tones of green and stretches of foliage. Whoever calls it monotonous has never watched its varying

complexions or the visible breath of Indian summer which never departs from it at any season.

"Mother came in from meeting one day," said Grandma Padgett, "and went into her bedroom and threw her shawl on the bed. She had company to dinner and was in a hurry. It was a fine silk shawl with fringe longer than my hand. Uncle Henry brought it over the mountains as a present. But Adeline come in and saw the fringe and thought what nice doll hair it would make. So by and by mother has an errand in the bedroom, and she sees her shawl travelling down behind the bed, and doesn't know what to think. Then she hears something snip, snip, and lifts up the valance and looks under the bed, and there sets Adeline cutting the fringe off her shawl! She had it half cut off."

"And what did Grandma do then?" aunt Corinne omitted not to ask.

"Oh, she punished Adeline. But that never had any effect on her. Adeline was a funny child," said Grandma Padgett, retrospective tenderness showing through her blue glasses. "I remember once she got to eatin' brown paper, and mother told her it would kill her if she didn't quit it. Adeline--made up her mind she was going to eat brown paper if it did kill her. She never doubted that it would come true as mother said. But she prepared to die, and made her will and divided her things. Mother found it out and put a stop to the business. I remember," said Grandma Padgett, laughing, "that I was disappointed, because I had to give back what she willed to me! yet I didn't want Adeline to die. She was a lively child. She jumped out of windows and tom-boyed around, but everybody liked her. Once I had some candy and divided fair enough, I thought, but Adeline after she ate up what she had, said I'd be sorry if I didn't give her more, because she was going, to die. It worked so well on my feelings that next time I tried that plan on Adeline's feelings, and told her if she didn't do something I wanted her to do _she'd_ be sorry; for I was going to die. She said she knew it; everybody was going to die some day, and she couldn't help it and wasn't going to be sorry for any such thing! Poor Adeline: many a year she's been gone, and I'm movin' further away from the old home."

Grandma Padgett lifted the lines and slapped them on the backs of old Hickory and Henry. Rousing themselves from coltish recollections of their own, perhaps, the horses began to trot.

[Illustration: THE LAWYER.]

In Indiana, some reaches of the 'pike were built on planks instead of broken stone, and gave out a hollow rumble instead of a flinty roar. The shape and firmness of the road-bed were the same, but the ends of boards sometimes cropped out along the sides. In this day, branches of the old national thoroughfare penetrate to every part of the Hoosier State. The people build 'pikes instead of what are called dirt roads. There are, of course, many muddy lanes and by-ways. But they have some of the best drives which have been lifted out of the Mississippi Valley.

Though the small caravan had lost time, and Son Tip might be waiting at the Illinois line before they reached that point, Grandma Padgett said they would all go to morning meeting in the town where they stopped Saturday night, and only drive a short piece on Sunday afternoon. She hated to be on expense, but they had much to return thanks for; and the Israelites made Sabbath day's journeys when they were moving.

The first Sunday--which seemed so remote now--had been partially spent in a grove where they camped for dinner, and Grandma Padgett read the Bible, and made Bobaday and Corinne answer their catechism. But this June Sunday was to be of a thanksgiving character. And they spent it in Greenfield.

At Cambridge City little Carrie roused sufficiently to eat with evident relish. But no such recollection of Dublin, Jamestown called Jimtown for short, by some inhabitants, and only distinguished by its location from another Jamestown in the State---Knightstown and Charlottesville, remained to her as remained to Bobaday and Corinne. The Indiana village did not differ greatly from the Ohio village situated on the 'pike. There were always the church with a bonny little belfry, and the schoolhouse more or less mutilated as to its weather boarding. The 'pike was the principal street, and such houses as sat at right angles to it, looked lonesome, and the dirt roads weedy or dusty.

Greenfield was a country seat and had a court house surrounded by trees. It looked long and straggling in the summer dusk. Zene, riding ahead to secure lodgings, came back as far as the culvert to tell Grandma Padgett there was no room at the tavern Court, was session, and the lawyers on the circuit filled the house. But there was another place, near where they now halted, that sometimes took in travellers for accommodation's sake. He pointed it out, a roomy building with a broad flight of log steps leading up to the front doors. Zene said it was not a tavern, but rather nicer than a tavern. He had already prevailed on the man and woman keeping it to take in his party.

Robert and aunt Corinne scampered up the log steps and Grandma Padgett led Fairy Carrie; after them. A plain tidy woman met them at the door and took them into a square room. There were the homemade carpet, the centre-table with daguerreotypes standing open and glaring such light as they had yet to reflect, samplers and colored prints upon the walls, but there was also a strange man busy with some papers at the table.

His hat stood beside him on the floor, and he dropped the sorted papers into it. He was, as Grandma Padgett supposed, one of the lawyers on the circuit. After looking up, he kept on sorting and folding his papers.

The woman went out to continue her supper-getting. In a remote part

of the house bacon could be heard hissing over the fire. Robert and Corinne sat upright on black chairs, but their guardian put Carrie on a padded lounge.

The little creature was dressed in aunt Corinne's clothing, giving it a graceful shape in spite of the broad tucks in sleeve, skirt and pantalet, which kept it from dragging over her hands or on the floor, She leaned against the wall, gazing around her with half-awakened interest. The dark circles were still about her eyes, but her pallor was flushed with a warmer color, Grandma Padgett pushed the damp curls off her forehead.

"Are you hungry, Sissy?" she inquired.

"No, ma'am," replied Carrie. "Yes, ma'am," she added, after a moment's reflection.

"She actually doesn't know," said Bobaday, sitting down on the lounge near Carrie. Upon this, aunt Corinne forsook her own black chair and sat on the other side of their charge.

"Do you begin to remember, now?" inquired Robert Day, smoothing the listless hands on Carrie's lap.

"How we run off with you--you know," prompted aunt Corinne, dressing a curl over her finger.

The child looked at each of them, smiling.

"Don't pester her," said Grandma Padgett, taking some work out of her dress pocket and settling herself by a window to make use of the last primrose light in the sky.

"If we don't begin to make her talk, she'll forget how," exclaimed aunt Corinne. "Can't you 'member anything about your father and mother now, Carrie?"

[Illustration: THE "YOUNG MAN WHO SOLD TICKETS" APPEARS AT THE DOOR.]

The man who was sorting his papers at the table, turned an attentive eye and ear toward the children. But neither Bobaday nor Corinne considered that he broke up the family privacy. They scarcely noticed him.

"Grandma," murmured Carrie vaguely, turning her eyes toward their guardian by the window.

"Yes, that's Grandma," said Bobaday. "But don't you know where your own pa and ma are?"

"Papa," whispered Carrie, like a baby trying the words. "Mamma. Papa --mamma."

"Yes, dear," exclaimed aunt Corinne. "Where do they live? She's big enough to know that if she knows anything."

"Let's get her to sing a song," suggested Bobaday. "If she can remember a song, she can remember what happened before they made her sing."

"That papa?" said Carrie, looking at the stranger by the table.

"No," returned aunt Corinne, deigning a glance his way. "That's only a gentleman goin' to eat supper here. Sing, Carrie. Now, Bobaday Padgett," warned aunt Corinne, shooting her whisper behind the curled head, "don't you go and scare her by sayin' anything about that pig-man."

"Don't you scare her yourself," returned Robert with a touch of indignation. "You've got her eyes to stickin' out now. Sing a pretty tune, Carrie. Come on, now."

The docile child slid off the lounge and stood against it, piping directly one of her songs. Yet while her trembling treble arose, she had a troubled expression, and twisted her fingers about each other.

In an instant this expression became one of helpless terror. She crowded back against the lounge and tried to hide herself behind Bobaday and Corinne.

They looked toward the door, and saw standing there the young man who sold tickets at the entrance of the pig-headed individual's show. His hands were in his pockets, but he appeared ready to intone forth:

"Walk right in, ladies and gentlemen, and hear Fairy Carrie, the child vocalist!" And the smoky torch was not needed to reveal his satisfaction in standing just where he did.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"COME TO MAMMA!"

Though the dissipated looking young man only stood at the door a moment, and then walked out on the log steps at a sauntering pace, he left dismay behind him. Aunt Corinne flew to her mother, imploring that Carrie be hid. Robert Day stood up before the child, frowning and shaking his head.

"All the pig-headed folks will be after her," exclaimed aunt Corinne. "They'll come right into this room so soon as that fellow tells them. Le's run out the back way, Ma Padgett!"

Grandma Padgett, who had been giving the full strength of her

spectacles to the failing light and her knitting, beheld this excitement with disapproval.

"You'll have my needles out," she objected. "What pig-headed folks are after what? Robert, have you hurt Sissy?"

"Why, Grandma Padgett, didn't you see the doorkeeper looking into the room?"

"Some person just looked in--person they appear to object to," said the strange man, giving keen attention to what was going forward. "Are these your own children, ma'am?"

Grandma Padgett rolled up her knitting, and tipped her head slightly back to bring the stranger well under her view.

"This girl and the boy belong to my family," she replied.

"But whose is the little girl on the lounge?"

"I don't know," replied Grandma Padgett, somewhat despondently. "I wish I did. She's a child that seems to be lost from her friends."

"But you can't take her away and give her to the show people again," exclaimed aunt Corinne, turning on this stranger with nervous defiance. "She's more ours than she is yours, and that ugly man scared her so she couldn't do anything but cry or go to sleep. If brother Tip was here he wouldn't let them have her."

"That man that just went out, is a showman," explained Robert Day, relying somewhat on the stranger for aid and re-inforcement. "She was in the show that he tended door for. They were awful people. Aunt Krin and I slipped her off with us."

"That's kidnapping. Stealing, you know," commented the stranger.

"_They'd_ stolen her," declared Bobaday.

"How do you know?"

"Look how 'fraid she was! I peeped into their wagon in the woods, and as soon as she opened her eyes and saw the man with the pig's head, she began to scream, and they smothered her up."

Grandma Padgett was now sitting on the lounge with Carrie lifted into her lap. Her voice was steady, but rather sharp. "This child's in a fit! Robert Day, run to the woman of the house and tell her to bring hot water as soon as she can."

During the confusion which followed, and while Carrie was partially undressed, rubbed, dipped, and dosed between her set teeth, the stranger himself went out to the log steps and stood looking from one end of the street to the other. The dissipated young man appeared

nowhere in the twilight.

Returning, the lawyer found Grandma Padgett holding her patient wrapped in shawls. The landlady stood by, much concerned, and talking about a great many remedies beside such as she held in her hands. Aunt Corinne and Robert Day maintained the attitude of guards, one on each side of the door.

Carrie was not only conscious again, but wide awake and tingling through all her little body. Her eyes had a different expression. They saw everything, from the candle the landlady held over her, to the stranger entering: they searched the walls piteously, and passed the faces of Bobaday and aunt Corinne as if they by no means recognized these larger children.

"I want my mamma!" she wailed. Tears ran down her face and Grandma Padgett wiped them away. But Carrie resisted her hand.

"Go away!" she exclaimed. "You aren't my mamma!"

"Poor little love!" sighed the landlady, who had picked up some information about the child.

"And you aren't my mamma!" resented Carrie. "I want my mamma to come to her little Rose."

"Says her name's Rose," said Grandma Padgett, exchanging a flare of her glasses for a startled look from the landlady.

"She says her name's Rose," repeated the landlady, turning to the lawyer as a general public who ought to be informed. Robert and Corinne began to hover between the door and the lounge, vigilant at both extremes of their beat.

"Rose," repeated the lawyer, bending forward to inspect the child.

"Rose what? Have you any other name, my little girl?"

"I not your little girl," wept their excited patient. "I'm my mamma's little girl. Go away! you're an ugly papa."

Bobaday and Corinne chuckled at this accusation. Aunt Corinne could not bring herself to regard the lawyer as an ally. If he wished to play a proper part he should have gone out and driven the doorkeeper and all the rest of those show-people from Greenfield. Instead of that, he stood about, listening.

"I haven't even seen such people," murmured the landlady in reply to a whispered question from Grandma Padgett. "There was a young man came in to ask if we had more room, but I didn't like his looks and told him no, we had no more. Court-times we can fill our house if we want to. But I'm always particular. We don't take shows at all. The shows that come through here are often rough. There was a magic-lantern man we let put up with us. But circuses and such things can go to

the regular tavern, says I. And if the regular tavern can't accommodate them, it's only twenty mile to Injunop'lis."

"I was afraid they might have got into the house," said Grandma Padgett. "And I wouldn't know what to do. I couldn't give her up to them again, when the bare sight throws her into spasms, unless I was made to do it."

"You couldn't prove any right to her," observed the lawyer.

"No, I couldn't," replied Grandma Padgett, expressing some injury in her tone. "But on that account ought I to let her go to them that would mistreat her?"

"She may be their child," said the lawyer. "People have been known to maltreat their children before. You only infer that they stole her."

Aunt Corinne told her nephew in a slightly guarded whisper, that she never had seen such a mean man as that one was.

"They ought to prove it before they get her, then," said Grandma Padgett.

"Yes," he assented. "They ought to prove it."

"And they must be right here in the place," she continued. "I'm afraid I'll have trouble with them."

"We could go on to-night," exclaimed Robert Day. "We could go on to Indianapolis, and that's where the governor lives, Zene says; and when we told the governor, he'd put the pig-headed folks in jail." Small notice being taken of this suggestion by the elders, Robert and Corinne bobbed their heads in unison and discussed it in whispers together.

The woman of the house locked up that part which let out upon the log steps, before she conducted her guests to supper. She was a partisan of Grandma Padgett's.

At table the brown-eyed child whom Grandma Padgett still held upon her lap, refused food and continued to demand her mother. She leaned against the old lady's shoulder seeing every crack in the walls, every dish upon the cloth, the lawyer who sat opposite, and the concerned faces of Bobaday and Corinne. Supper was too good to be slighted, in spite of Carrie's dangerous position. The man of the house was a Quaker, and while his wife stood up to wait on the table, he repeatedly asked her in a thee-and-thou language highly edifying to aunt Corinne, for certain pickles and jams and stuffed mangoes; and as she brought them one after the other, he helped the children plentifully, twinkling his eyes at them. He was a delicious old fellow; as good in his way as the jams.

"And won't thee have some-in a sasser?" he inquired tenderly of

Carrie, "and set up and feed thyself? Thee ought to give thy grandame a chance to eat her bite--don't thee be a selfish little dear."

"I want my mamma," responded Carrie, at once taking this twinkle-eyed childless father into her confidence. "I'm waiting for my mamma. When she comes she'll give me my supper and put me to bed."

"Thee's a big enough girl to wait ort thyself," said the Quaker, not understanding the signs his wife made to him.

"She doesn't live at your house," pursued the, child. "She lives at papa's house."

"Where is papa's house?" inquired the lawyer helping himself to bread as if that were the chief object of his thoughts.

"It's away off. Away over the woods."

"And what's papa's name?"

Carrie appeared to consider the questioner rather than the question, and for some unexpressed reason, remained silent.

"Mother," said the Quaker from the abundant goodness of his heart, "doesn't thee mind that damson p'serve thee never let's me have unless I take the ag'y and shake for it? Some of that would limber a little girl's tongue, doesn't thee think?"

"It's in the far pantry on a high shelf," said the woman of the house, demurring slightly.

"I can reach it down."

"No, I'll bring it myself. The jars are too crowded on that shelf for a man's hands to be turned loose among 'em."

The Quaker smiled, sparkling considerably under his gray eyebrows while his wife took another light and went after the damson preserve. She had been gone but a moment when knocking began at the front door, and the Quaker rose at once from his place to answer it.

[Illustration: "COME TO MAMMA."]

Robert Day and Corinne looked at each other in apprehension. They pictured a fearful procession coming in. Even their guardian gave an anxious start. She parted her lips to beg the Quaker not to admit any one, but the request was absurd.

Their innocent host piloted straight to the dining-room a woman whom Robert and Corinne knew directly. They had seen her in the show, and recalled her appearance many a time afterwards when speculating about Carrie's parents.

"Here you are!" she exclaimed to the child in a high key. "My poor little pet! Come to mamma!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FAIRY CARRIE DEPARTS.

Neither William Sebastian, the Quaker landlord, nor his wife, returning with the damson preserves in her hand--not even Grandma Padgett and her family, looked at Fairy Carrie more anxiously than the lawyer.

"Is this your mother, Sissy?" inquired Grandma Padgett.

"No," replied the child; A blank, stupid expression replacing her excitement. "Yes. Mamma?"

The woman sat down and took Carrie upon her lap, twisting her curls and caressing her.

"Where have you been, frightening us all to death!" she exclaimed. "The child is sick; she must have some drugs to quiet her."

"She's just come out of a spasm," said Grandma Padgett distantly. "Seems as if a young man scared her."

"Yes; that was Jarvey," said the woman. "E found her here. Carrie was always afraid of Jarvey after he-tried to teach her wire-walking, and let her fall. Jarvey would've fetched her right away with him, But 'e knows I don't like to 'ave 'im meddle with her now."

"She says her name's Rose," observed the wife of William Sebastian, taking no care to veil her suspicion.

"'Tis Rose," replied the woman indifferently, passing her hand in repeated strokes down the child's face as it was pressed to her shoulder. "The h'other's professional--Fairy Carrie. We started 'igher. I never expected to come down with my child to such a miserable little combination. But we've 'ad misfortunes. Her father died coming over. We're English. We 'ad good engagements in the Provinces, and sometimes played in London. The manager as fetched us over, failed to keep his promises, and I had no friends 'ere. I had to do what I could."

An actual resemblance to Carrie appeared in the woman's face. She wiped tears from, the dark rings under her eyes.

William Sebastian's wife rested her knuckles on the table, still regarding Carrie's mother with perplexed distrust.

While returning none of the caresses she received, the child lay quite docile and submissive.

"Well," said Grandma Padgett, still distantly "folks bring up their children different. There's gypsies always live in tents, and I suppose show-people always expect to travel with shows. I don't know anything about it. But I do know when that child came to me she'd been dosed nearly to death with laudanum, or some sleepin' drug, and didn't really come to her senses till after her spasm."

The woman cast a piteous expression at her judge.

"She's so nervous, poor pet! Perhaps I'm in the 'abit of giving her too much. But she lives in terror of the company we 'ave to associate with, and I can't see her nerves be racked."

"Thee ought to stop such wrong doings," pronounced William Sebastian, laying his palm decidedly on the table. "Set theeself to some honest work and put the child to school. Her face is a rebuke to us that likes to feel at peace."

The woman glanced resentfully at him.

"The child is gifted," she maintained. "I'm going to make a hartist of her."

She smoothed Carrie's wan hands, and, as if noticing her borrowed clothing for the first time, looked about the room for the tinsel and gauze.

[Illustration: THE CHILD LAY QUITE DOCILE AND SUBMISSIVE.]

"The things she had on her when she come to us," said Grandma Padgett, "were literally gone to nothing. The children had run so far and rubbed over fences and sat in the grass. I didn't even think it was worth while to save the pieces; and I put my least one's clothes on her for some kind of a covering.

"It was her concert dress," said the woman, regarding aunt Corinne's pantalets with some contempt. "I suppose I hought to thank you, but since she was hinticed away, I can't. When one 'as her feelings 'arrowed up for nearly a week as mine have been 'arrowed, one can't feel thankful. I will send these 'ere things back by Jarvey. Well, ladies and gentlemen, let me bid you good evening. The performance 'as already begun and we professionals cannot shirk business."

"You give an exhibition in Greenfield to-night, do you?" inquired the lawyer.

"Yes, sir," replied the woman, standing with Carrie in arms. She had some difficulty in getting at her pocket, but threw him a handbill.

Then passing out through the hall, she shut the front door behind her.

There were two other front doors to the house, though only the central one was in constant use, being left open in the summer weather, excepting on occasions such as the present, when William Sebastian's wife thought it should be locked. One of the other front doors opened into the sitting-room, but was barred with a tall bureau. The third led into a square room devoted to the lumber accumulations of the house. A bar and shelves for decanters remained there, but these William Sebastian had never permitted to be used since his name was painted on the sign.

Mrs. Sebastian felt a desire to confuse the outgoing woman by the three doors and imprison her in the old store room.

"I don't think the child's hers," exclaimed Mrs. Sebastian.

"Thee isn't Solomon," observed the Quaker, twinkling at his wife.

"Thee cannot judge who the true mother may be."

"She shouldn't got in here if I'd had the keeping of the door," continued Mrs. Sebastian. "I may not be Solomon, but I think I could keep the varmints out of my own chicken house."

Grandma Padgett set her glasses in a perplexed stare at the door.

"She didn't let us say good-by to Fairy Carrie," exclaimed aunt Corinne indignantly, "and kept her face hid away all the time so she couldn't look at us. I'd hate to have such a ma!"

"She'll whip the poor little thing for running off with us, when she gets her away," said Robert Day, listening for doleful sounds.

"Well, what does thee think of this business?" inquired William Sebastian of the lawyer who was busying himself drawing squares on the tablecloth with a steel fork. "It ought to come in thy line. Thee deals with criminals and knows the deceitfulness of our human hearts. What does thee say to the woman?"

The lawyer smiled as he laid down his fork, and barely mentioned the conflicting facts:

"She took considerable pains to tell something about herself: more than was necessary. But if they kidnapped the child, they are dangerously bold and confident in exhibiting and claiming her."

CHAPTER XX.

SUNDAY ON THE ROAD.

Aunt Corinne occupied with her mother a huge apartment over the sitting-room, in which was duplicated the fireplace below. At this season the fireplace was closed with a black board on which paraded balloon-skirted women cut out of fashion plates.

The chimneys were built in two huge stacks at the gable-ends of the house, outside the weather boarding: a plan the architects of this day utterly condemn. The outside chimney was, however, as far beyond the stick-and-clay stacks of the cabin, as our fire-stone flues are now beyond it. This house with log steps no longer stands as an old landmark by the 'pike side in Greenfield. But on that June morning it looked very pleasant, and the locust-trees in front of it made the air heavy with perfume. There is no flower like the locust for feeding honey to the sense of smell. Half the bees from William Sebastian's hives were buzzing overhead, when Bobaday and aunt Corinne sat down by Zene on the log steps to unload their troubles. All three were in their Sunday clothes. Zene had even greased his boots, and looked with satisfaction on the moist surfaces which he stretched forth to dry in the sun.

He had not seen Carrie borne away, but he had been to the show afterwards, and heard her sing one of her songs. He told the children she acted like she never see a thing before her, and would go dead asleep if they didn't stick pins in her like they did in a woman he seen walkin' for money once. Robert was fain to wander aside on the subject of this walking woman, but aunt Corinne kept to Fairy Carrie, and made Zene tell every scrap of information he had about her.

"After I rubbed the horses this mornin'," he proceeded, "I took a stroll around the burg, and their tent and wagon's gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed aunt Corinne. "Clear out of town?"

Zene said he allowed so. He could show the children where the tent and wagon stood, and it was bare ground now. He had also discovered the time-honored circus-ring, where every summer the tinsel host rode and tumbled. But under the circumstances, a circus-ring had no charms.

"Then they've got her," said Bobaday. "We'll never see the pretty little thing again. If I'd been a man I wouldn't let that woman have her, like Grandma Padgett did. Grown folks are so funny. I did wish some grand people would come in the night and say she was their child, and make the show give her up."

Aunt Corinne arose to fly to her mother and Mrs. Sebastian with the news. But the central door opening on the instant and Mrs. Sebastian, her husband and guest coming out, aunt Corinne had not far to fly.

"The woman is a stealer," she added to her breathless recital. "She didn't even send my things back."

"She's welcome to them," said Grandma Padgett, shaking her head, "but I feel for that child, whether the rightful owners has her or not."

"This is Lord's Day," said William Sebastian to the children, "along the whole length of the pike, and across the whole breadth of the country. Thy little friend will get her First Day blessing."

He wore a gray hat, half-high in the crown, and a gray coat which flapped his calves when he walked. His trousers were of a cut which reached nearly to his armpits, but this fact was kept from the public by a vest crawling well toward his knees. Yet he looked beautifully tidy and well-dressed. His wife, who was not a Quaker, had by no means such an air of simple grandeur.

Grandma Padgett and aunt Corinne, somewhat reluctantly followed by Zene, were going to the Methodist church. Already its bell was filling the air. But Robert hung back and asked if he might not go to Quaker meeting.

"Thee couldn't sit and meditate," said William Sebastian.

Bobaday assured William Sebastian he could sit very still, and he always meditated. When he ran after his grandmother to get her consent, it occurred to him to find out from Zene how the pig-headed man was, and if he looked as ugly as ever. But aunt Corinne scorned the question, and quite flew at him for asking it.

The Methodist services Robert knew by heart: the open windows, the high pulpit where the preacher silently knelt first thing, hymn books rustling cheerfully, the hymn given out two lines at a time to be sung by the congregation, then the kneeling of everybody and the prayer, more singing, and the sermon, perhaps followed by an exhortation, when the preacher talked loud enough for the boys sitting out on the fence to hear every word. Perhaps a few children whispered, or a baby cried and its mother took it out. Everybody seemed happy and astir. After church there was so much handshaking that the house emptied very slowly.

But on his return he described the Quaker meeting to aunt Corinne.

"They all sat and sat," said Bobaday. "It was a little bit of a house and not half so many folks could get in it as sit in the corners by the pulpit in Methodist meeting. And they sat and sat, and nobody said a word or gave out a hymn. The women looked at the cracks in the floor. You could hear everything outdoors. After a long time they all got up and shook hands. Mrs. Sebastian said to Mr. Sebastian when we came away, 'The spirit didn't appear to move anybody this morning.' And he said, 'No: but it was a blessed meeting.'"

"Didn't your legs cramp?" inquired aunt Corinne.

"Yes; and my nose tickled and I wanted to sneeze."

"But you dursn't move your thumb even. That lawyer that ate supper here last night would like such a meeting, wouldn't he?"

The lawyer was coming up the log steps while Robert spoke of him. And with him was a lady who looked agitated, and whom he had to assist.

Robert and Corinne, at the open sitting-room window, looked at each other with quick apprehension.

"Aunt Krin, _that's_ her mother," said aunt Krin's nephew. His young relative grasped his arm and exclaimed in an awe-struck whisper:

"Bobaday Padgett!"

CHAPTER XXI.

HER MOTHER ARRIVES.

Both children regarded the strange lady with breathless interest when the lawyer seated her in the room. They silently classed her among the rich, handsome and powerful people of the earth. She had what in later years they learned to call refinement, but at that date they could give it no name except niceness. When Grandma Padgett and the landlord's wife were summoned to the room, she grew even younger and more elegant in appearance, though her face was anxious and her eyes were darkened by crying.

"This is Mrs. Tracy from Baltimore," said the lawyer. "She was in Chicago yesterday, and I telegraphed for her a half-hour or so before the child was taken out of the house. She came as far as Indianapolis, and found no Pan Handle train, this morning, so she was obliged to get a carriage and drive over. Mrs. Sebastian, will you be kind enough to set out something for her to eat as soon as you can? She has not thought of eating since she started. And Mrs.--what did I understand your name to be?"

[Illustration: "THIS IS LORD'S DAY," SAID WILLIAM SEBASTIAN.]

"Padgett," replied the children's guardian.

"Yes; Mrs. Padgett. Mrs. Padgett, my client is hunting a lost child, and hearing this little girl was with you some days, she would like to make some inquiries."

"But the child's taken clear away!" exclaimed Grandma Padgett.

"If you drove out from Injunop'lis," said the Quaker's wife, "you must have met the show-wagon on the 'pike."

"The show-wagon took to a by-road," observed the lawyer. "We have men tracking it now."

"I knew it wasn't right for them to carry off that child," said the Quaker's wife, "and if I'd tended the door they wouldn't carried her off."

"It was best not to arouse their suspicions before she could be identified," said the lawyer. "It's easy enough to take her when we know she is the child we want."

"Maybe so," said the Quaker's wife.

"Easy enough. The vagabonds can't put themselves beyond arrest before we can reach them, and on the other hand, they could make a case against us if we meddle with them unnecessarily. Since Mrs. Tracy came West a couple of weeks ago, and since she engaged me in her cause, we have had a dozen wrong parties drawn up for examination; children of all ages and sizes."

"Did she," inquired Mrs. Tracy, bringing her chair close to Grandma Padgett and resting appealing eyes on the blue glasses, "have hair that curled? Rather long hair for a child of her years."

"Yes'm," replied Grandma Padgett with dignified tenderness. "Long for a child about five or six, as I took her to be. But she was babyish for all that."

"Yes--oh, yes!" said Mrs. Tracy.

"And curly. How long since you lost her?"

The lady from Baltimore sobbed on her handkerchief, but recovered with a resolute effort, and replied:

"It was nearly three months ago. She was on the street with her nurse, and was taken away almost miraculously. We could not find a trace. Her papa is dead, but I have always kept his memory alive to her. My friends have helped me search, but it has seemed day after day as if I could not bear the strain any longer."

Grandma Padgett took off her glasses and polished them.

"I know how you feel," she observed, glancing at Robert Day and Corinne. "I had a scare at Richmond, in this State."

"Are these your children?"

"My youngest and my grandson. It was their notion of running away with the little girl, and their gettin' lost, that put me to such a worry:"

Mrs. Tracy extended her hands to Bobaday and aunt Corinne, drawing one to each side of her, and made the most minute inquiries about Fairy Carrie. She knew that the child had called herself Rose, and that she had been in a partially stupified state during her stay with the little caravan. But when Robert mentioned the dark circles in the child's face, and her crying behind the tent, the lady turned white and leaned back, closing her eyes and groping for a small yellow bottle in her pocket. Having smelled of this, she recovered herself.

But aunt Corinne, in spite of her passionate sympathy, could barely keep from tittering at the latter action. Though the smelling bottle was yellow, instead of a dull blue, like the one Ma Padgett kept in the top bureau drawer at home, aunt Corinne recognized her enemy and remembered the time she hunted out that treasure and took a long, strong, tremendous snuff at it, expecting to revel in odors of delight. Her head tingled again while she thought about it; she felt a thousand needles running through her nose, and saw herself sitting on the floor shedding tears. How anybody could sniff at a hartshorn bottle and find it a consolation or restorative under any circumstances, she could not understand.

Mrs. Sebastian, in her First Day clothes, and unwilling to lose a word of what was going on in the sitting-room, had left the early dinner to her assistant. But she brought in a cup of strong tea, and some cream toast, begging the bereaved mother to stay her stomach with that until the meal's victuals was ready. Mrs. Tracy appeared to have forgotten that her stomach needed staying, but she thanked the landlady and drank the tea as if thirsty, between her further inquiries about the child.

"Are you not sure," she asked the lawyer, "that we are on the right track this time?"

He said he was not sure, but indications were better than they had been before.

"I don't wish to reproach you," said Mrs. Tracy, "but it is a fearful thought to me, that they may be poisoning my child with opiates again and injuring her perhaps for life. You might have detained her."

"That's what I've said right along," exclaimed Mrs. Sebastian.

"But there was that woman who pretended to be her rightful mother," observed Grandma Padgett, who, though not obliged to set up any defence, wanted the case seen in all its bearings. "There _she_ set, easy and deliberate, telling _her_ story, how the little thing's father died comin' over the water, and how hard, it was for her to do the right thing by the child. She maintained she only dosed the child to keep her from sufferin'. I didn't believe her, but we had nothing to set up against her."

Mrs. Tracy became as erect and fierce in aspect as such a delicate

creature could become. The long veil of crape which hung from her bonnet and swept the floor, emphasizing the blackness of all her other garments, trembled as she rose.

"Why am I sitting here and waiting for anything, when that woman is claiming my child for her own? The idea of anybody's daring to own my child! It is more cruel than abuse. I never thought of their being able to teach her to forget me--that they could confuse her mamma with another person in her mind!"

"You're tired out," said the lawyer, "and matters are moving just as rapidly as if you were chasing over all the roads in Hancock County. You must quiet yourself, ma'am, or you'll break down."

Mrs. Tracy made apparent effort to quiet herself. She took hold of Grandma Padgett's arm when they were called out to dinner. Robert walked on the other side of her, having her hand on his shoulder and aunt Corinne went behind, carrying the end of the crape veil as if Fairy Carrie's real mother could thus receive support and consolation through the back of the head.

Nobody was more concerned about her trouble than William Sebastian. And he remembered more tempting pickles and jellies than had ever been on the table before at once. Yet the dinner was soon over.

Grandma Padgett said she had intended to go a piece on the road that afternoon anyhow, but she could not feel easy in her mind to go very far until the child was found. Virginia folks and Marylanders were the same as neighbors. If Mrs. Tracy would take a seat in the carriage, they would make it their business to dally along the road and meet the word the men out searching were to bring in. Mrs. Tracy clung to Grandma Padgett's arm as if she knew what a stay the Ohio neighbors had always found this vigorous old lady. The conveyance which brought her from Indianapolis had been sent back. She was glad to be with the Padgetts. No railroad trains would pass through until next day. William Sebastian helped her up the carriage steps, and aunt Corinne set down reverently on the back seat beside her. Zene was already rumbling ahead with the wagon. Mrs. Sebastian came down the steps of log and put a hearty lunch in. It was particularly for the child they hoped to find.

[Illustration: MRS. TRACY MAKES INQUIRIES.]

"Make her eat something," she counselled the mother. "She hardly tasted a bite of supper last night, and according to all accounts, she ain't in hands that understands feedin' children now."

"The Lord prosper all thy undertakings," said William Sebastian, "and don't thee forget to let us know what hour we may begin to rejoice with thee."

The lawyer touched his hat as Hickory and Henry stepped away on the plank 'pike. He remained in Greenfield, and was to ride after them if

any news came in about Fairy Carrie.

CHAPTER XXII.

A COUNTRY SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

However we may spend our Sabbath, it is different from the other days of the week. I have often thought the little creatures of field and woods knew the difference. They run or sing with more gladness and a less business-like air. The friskiest lambs, measuring strength with each other by stiff-legged jumps, are followed by gentle bleats from their mothers, and come back after a frolic to meditate and switch their tails. The fleecy roll of a lamb's tail, and the dimples which seem to dint its first coat, the pinkness of its nose, and the drollery of its eye, are all worth watching under a cloudless Sunday sky.

As the carriage and wagon rolled along the 'pike, they met other vehicles full of people driving for an outing, or going to afternoon Sunday-school held in schoolhouses along the various by-roads.

Mrs. Tracy leaned forward every time a buggy passed the wagon, and scanned its occupants until they turned towards the right to pass Grandma Padgett.

The first messenger they met entered on the 'pike from a cross-road some distance ahead of them, but was checked in his canter toward Greenfield by Zene, who stopped the wagon for a parley. Mrs. Tracy was half irritated by such officiousness, and Grandma Padgett herself intended to call Zene to account, when he left the white and gray and came limping to the carriage at the rider's side. However, the news he helped to bring, and the interest he took in it, at once excused him. This man, scouring the country north and south since early morning, had heard nothing of the show-wagon.

It might be somewhere in the woods, or jogging innocently along a dirt road. It was no longer an object to the searchers. He believed the woman and child had left it, intending to rejoin it at some appointed place when all excitement was over. He said he thought he had the very woman and child back here a piece, though they might give him the slip before he could bring anybody to certainly identify them.

"My little one 'give me the slip'!" exclaimed Mrs. Tracy indignantly.

The man said his meaning was, she might be slipped off by her keeper.

"Where have you got them?" inquired Grandma Padgett.

"He saw 'em goin' into Sunday-school, marm," explained Zene.
"There's a meetin'-house over yonder three or four mile," pointing with his whip.

"It's the unlikeliest place that ever was," said the messenger, polishing his horse's wet neck. "And I suppose that's what the woman thought when she slipped in there. If I hadn't happened by in the nick of time I wouldn't mistrusted. She didn't see me. She was goin' up the steps, with her back to the road, and the meetin'-house sets a considerable piece from the fence. They was all singin' loud enough to drown a horse's feet in the dust."

"And both were like the descriptions you had?" said Mrs. Tracy.

"So nigh like that I half-pulled up and had a notion to go in and see for myself. Then, thinks I, you better wait and bring-the ones that would know for sure. There ain't no harm in that."

Before the mother could speak again, Grandma Padgett told the man to turn back and direct them, and Zene to fall behind the carriage with his load. He could jog leisurely in the wake of the carriage, to avoid getting separated from it: that would be all he need attempt. She took up her whip to touch Hickory and Henry.

After turning off on the by-road, Grandma Padgett heard Zene leisurely jogging in the wake of the carriage, and remembered for a moment, with dismay, the number of breakable things in his load. He drove all the way to the meeting-house with the white and gray constantly rearing their noses from contact with the hind carriage curtains; up swells, when the road wound through stump-bordered sward, and down into sudden gullies, when all his movables clanged and rumbled, as if protesting against the unusual speed they had to endure. Zene was as anxious to reach the meeting-house as the man who cantered ahead.

They drew up to where it basked on the rising ground, an old brown frame with lichens crusting the roof. There were two front doors, a flight of wooden steps leading up to each, and three high windows along the visible side. All these stood open letting out a pleasant hum, through which the cracked voice of an old man occasionally broke. No hump of belfry stood upon its back. The afternoon sun was the bell which called that neighborhood together for Sunday-school. And this unconscious duty performed, the afternoon sun now brightened the graves which crowded to the very fence, brought out the glint and polish of the new marble headstones, or showed the grooved names in the old and leaning slate ones. Some graves were enclosed by rails, and others barely lifted their tops above the long grass. There were baby-nests hollowing into the turf, and clay-colored piles set head and foot with fresh boards. And on all these aunt Corinne looked with an interest which graves never failed to rouse in her, no matter what the occasion might be.

[Illustration: THE FIRST MESSENGER.]

The horses switched their tails along the outside of the fence. One backed his vehicle as far as his hitching-strap would let him, against the wheels of another's buggy, that other immediately responding by a similar movement. Some of them turned their heads and challenged Hickory and Henry and the saddle-horse with speaking whinnies. "Whe-hee-hee-hee! You going to be tied up here for the grass-flies to bite too? Where do you come from, and why don't you kick your folks for going to afternoon meeting in hot June time?"

The pilot of the caravan had helped take horse-thieves in his time, and he considered this a similar excursion. He dismounted swiftly, but with an air of caution, and as he let down the carriage steps, said he thought they better surround the house.

But Mrs. Tracy reached the ground as if she did not see him, and ran through the open gate with her black draperies flowing in a rush behind her. Robert Day and aunt Corinne were anxious to follow, and the man tied Grandma Padgett's horses to a rail fence across the road, while some protest was made among the fly-bitten row against the white cover of Zene's moving-wagon.

Although Bobaday felt excited and eager as he trotted up the grass path after Mrs. Tracy, the spirit of the country Sunday-school came out of doors to meet him.

There were the class of old men and the class of old women in the corner seats each side of the pulpit, and their lesson was in the Old Testament. The young ladies listened to the instruction of the smart young man of the neighborhood, and his sonorous words rolled against the echoing walls. He usually taught the winter district and singing schools. The young girl who did for summer schoolmiss, had a class of rosebud children in the middle of the meetinghouse, and they crowded to Her lap and crawled up on her shoulders, though their mothers, in the mothers' class, shook warning heads at them. Scent of cloves, roses and sweetbrier mingled with the woody smell of a building shut close six days out of seven. Two rascals in the boys' class, who, evading their teacher's count, had been down under the seats kicking each other with stiff new shoes, emerged just as the librarian came around with a pile of books, ready to fight good-naturedly over the one with the brightest cover. The boy who got possession would never read the book, but he could pull it out of his jacket pocket and tantalize the other boy going home.

The Sunday-school was a wholesome, happy place, even for these young heathen who were enjoying their bodies too much to care particularly about their souls. And when the superintendent stood up to rap the school to order for the close of the session, and line out one of Watts's sober hymns, there was a pleasant flutter of getting ready, and the smart young man of the neighborhood took his tuning-fork from his vest pocket to hit against his teeth so he could set the tune. He wore a very short-tailed coat, and had his hair brushed up in a high roach from his forehead, and these two facts conspired to give him a

brisk and wide awake appearance as he stepped into the aisle holding a singing book in his hand.

But no peaceful, long-drawn hymn floated through the windows and wandered into the woods. The twang of the tuning-fork was drowned by a succession of cries. The smart young man's eyebrows went up to meet his roach while he stood in the aisle astonished to see a lady in trailing black clothes pounce upon a child strange to the neighborhood, and exclaim over, and cover it with kisses.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FORWARD.

Some of the boys climbed upon seats to look, and there was confusion. A baby or two in the mothers' class began to cry, but the mothers themselves soon understood what was taking place, and forgot the decorum of Sunday-school, to crowd up to Mrs. Tracy.

"The child is hers," one said to another. "It must have been lost. Who brought it in here?"

The fortunate messenger who had been successful in his undertaking, talked in undertones to the superintendent, telling the whole story with an air of playing the most important part in it. In return, the superintendent mentioned the notice he had taken of those two strangers, his attempt to induce the woman to go to the mothers' class, her restlessness and the child's lassitude.

The smart young man stood close by, receiving the correct version of the affair, and holding his tuning-fork and book behind him; and all the children, following their elders, flocked to seats around Mrs. Tracy, gazing over one another's shoulders, until she looked up abashed at the chaos her excitement had made.

"It's really your child?" said Grandma Padgett, sitting down beside the mother with a satisfied and benevolent expression.

"Oh, indeed, yes! Don't you know mamma, darling?"

For reply, the little girl was clinging mutely to her mother's neck. Her curls were damp and her eyes very dark-ringed. But there was recognition in her face very different from the puzzled and crouching obedience she had yielded to the one who claimed her before.

"They've been dosing her again," pronounced Grandma Padgett severely.

"And she's all beat out tramping, poor little thing!" said one of the neighborhood mothers. "Look at them dusty feet!"

Mrs. Tracy gathered the dusty feet into her lap and wiped them with her lace handkerchief.

Word went forth to the edge of the crowd that the little girl needed water to revive her, and half a dozen boys raced to the nearest house for a tin pailful.

With love-feast tenderness the neighborhood mothers administered the dripping cup to little Rose Tracy when the boys returned. Her face and head were bathed, and hands and feet cooled. The old women all prescribed for her, and her mother listened to everybody with distended eyes, but fell into such frequent paroxysms of kissing her little girl that some of the boys ducked their heads to chuckle. This extravagant affection was more than they could endure.

"But where's that woman?" inquired Robert Day. He stood up on the seat behind his grandmother and Mrs. Tracy, and could see all over the house, but his eyes roamed unsuccessfully after the English player. The people having their interest diverted by that question, turned their heads and began to ask each other where she was. Nobody had noticed her leave the church, but it was a common thing to be passing in and out during Sunday school. She had made her escape. Half the assembly would have pursued her on the instant; she could not be far away. But Mrs. Tracy begged them to let her go; she did not want the woman, could not endure the sight of her, and never wished to hear of her again. Whatever harm was done to her child, was done. Her child was what she had come in search of, and she had it.

So the group eager to track a kidnapper across fields and along fence-corners, calmed their zeal and contented themselves with going outdoors and betting on what direction the fugitive from punishment had taken.

Perhaps she had grown to love little Rose, and was punished in having to give her up. In any case, the Pig-headed man and the various people attached to his show, no more appeared on the track followed by Grandma Padgett's caravan. Mrs. Tracy would not have him sought out and arrested, and he only remained in the minds of Robert and aunt Corinne as a type of monster.

When they left the meeting-house, the weather had changed. People dismissed from Sunday-school with scater ceremony than usual, got into their conveyances to hurry home, for thunder sounded in the west, and the hot air was already cooled by a rush of wet fragrance from the advancing rain.

[Illustration: THEY BADE FAIRY CARRIE GOOD-BY.]

It proved to be a quick shower, white and violent while it lasted, making the fields smoke, and walling out distant views. Spouts of water ran off the carriage top down the oil cloth apron which protected Robert and his grandmother. Mrs. Tracy held her little girl

in her lap, and leaned back with an expression of perfect happiness. The rain came just as her comfort had come, after so much parching suspense. Aunt Corinne wondered in silence if anything could be nicer than riding under a snug cover on which the sky-streams pelted, through a wonderland of fragrance. Every grateful shrub and bit of sod, the pawpaw leaves and spicewood stems, the half-formed hazel-nuts in fluted sheaths, and even new hay-stacks in the meadows, breathed out their best to the rain. The world never seems so fresh and lovable as after a June shower.

Presently the sun was shining, and the ground-incense steaming with stronger sweetness, and they came to the wet 'pike stretching like a russet-colored ribbon east and west, and turned west toward Indianapolis.

On the 'pike they met another of the men sent out by Mrs. Tracy and the lawyer. His horse's coat was smoking. Mrs. Tracy took up a gold pencil attached to her watch, and wrote a note to the lawyer. She was going on to the city, and would return directly home with her child. The note she sent by the men, after thanking them, and paying them in what Robert and his aunt considered a prodigal and wealthy manner.

So large a slice out of the afternoon had their trip to the meeting-house taken, that it was quite dark when the party drove briskly into Indianapolis.

It was a little city at that date. Still, Bobaday felt exalted by clanging car-bells and railroad crossings. It being Sunday evening, the freights were making up. The main street, called Washington, was but an extension of the 'pike, stretching broad and straight through the city. He noticed houses with balconies, set back on sloping lawns. Here a light disclosed a broad hall with dim stairs at the back. And in another place children were playing under trees; he could hear their calls, and by straining his eyes, barely discern that they wore sumptuous white city raiment. The tide of home-makers and beautifiers had not then rolled so far north of East Washington street as to leave it a mere boundary line.

Grandma Padgett and her party stopped at a tavern on Illinois street. Late in the night they were to separate, Mrs. Tracy taking the first train for Baltimore. So aunt Corinne and Robert, before going to bed, bade good-by to the child who had scarcely been a playmate to them, but more like a delicate plaything in whose helplessness they had felt such interest.

Rose, obeying her mamma, put her arms around their necks and kissed them, telling them to come and see her at home. She looked brighter than hitherto, and remembered a dollhouse and her birds at mamma's house; yet, her long course of opiates left her little recognition of the boy and girl she had so dimly seen.

Her mamma hugged them warmly, and Bobaday endured his share of the hugging with a very good grace, though he was so old. Then it seemed

but a breath until morning, and but another breath until they were under way, the wagon creaking along the dewy 'pike ahead of them, an opal clearness growing through the morning twilight, and no Fairy Carrie asleep, like some tiny enchanted princess, on the back seat.

"The rest of the way," observed Robert Day to his aunt, "there won't be anything happening--you see if there will. Zene says we're half across the State now. And I know we'll never see J. D. Matthews again. And nobody will be lost and have to be found, and there's no tellin' where that great big crowd Jonathan and his folks moved with, are."

"I feel lonesome," observed aunt Corinne somewhat pensively. "When Mrs. Tracy was sending back word to the Quaker tavern man, I wished we's going back to stay awhile longer. Some places are so nice!"

"Now it's a pretty thing for you to begin at your time of life," said Grandma Padgett, "to set your faces backward and wish for what's behind. That's a silly notion. Folks that encourage themselves in doin' it don't show sound sense. The One that made us knew better than to let us stand still in our experience, and I've always found them that go forward cheerfully will pretty generally keep the land of Beulah right around them. Git up, Hickory!"

Thus admonished, the children entered the lone bridge over White River, or that branch of White River on which Indianapolis is situated. The stream, seen between chinks in the floor, appeared deep, but not particularly limpid. How the horses' feet thundered on the boards, and how long they trod before the little star at the other end grew to an opening quite large enough to let any vehicle out of the bridge!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TOLL-WOMAN.

Still, as crossing the Sciota at Columbus, had been entering a land of adventure, crossing the White River at Indianapolis, seemed at first entering a land of commonplace.

The children were very tired of the wagon. Even aunt Corinne got permission to ride stretches of the road with Robert Day and Zene in the wagon. It gave out a different creak and jolted her until she was grateful for springs and cushions when obliged to go back to them. The landscape was still hazy, the woods grew more beautiful. But neither of the children cared for the little towns along the route: Bellville, Stilesville, Meridian, Manhattan, Pleasant Garden. Hills appeared and ledges of rock cropped out in them. Yet even hills may be observed with indifference by eyes weary of an endless panorama.

They drove more rapidly now to make up for lost time. Both children dived into the carriage pockets for amusement, and aunt Corinne dressed her rag doll a number of times each day. They talked of Rose Tracy, still calling her Fairy Carrie. Of the wonderful clothes her mother laid out to put upon her the night of her departure, in place of aunt Corinne's over-grown things, and the show woman's tawdry additions. They wondered about her home and the colored people who waited on her, and if she would be quite well and cured of her stupor by the time she reached Baltimore. Grandma Padgett told them Baltimore was an old city down in Maryland, and the National 'Pike started in its main street. From Baltimore over the mountains to Wheeling, in the Pan Handle of Virginia, was a grand route. There used to be a great deal of wagoning and stage-coaching, and driving droves of horses and cattle by that road. Perhaps, suggested aunt Corinne, Fairy Carrie would watch the 'pike for the Padgett family, but Bobaday ridiculed the idea. When he grew up a man he meant to go to Baltimore but the railroad would be his choice of routes.

Both Robert and his aunt were glad the day they stopped for dinner near a toll-house, and the woman came and invited them to dine with her.

The house stood on the edge of the 'pike, with its gate-pole ready to be lowered by a rope, looking like any other toll place. But the woman was very brisk and Yankee-like, and different from the many slatternly persons who had before taken toll. She said her people came from "down East," but she herself was born in Ohio. She thought the old lady would like a cup of strong tea, and her dinner was just ready, and it did get lonesome eating by a body's self day after day.

The Padgetts added their store to the square table set in a back room, and the toll-woman poured her steaming tea into cups covered with flower sprigs. Everything about her was neat and compact as a ship's cabin. Her bed stood in one corner, curtained with white dimity. There were two rooms to the toll-house, the front one being a kind of shop containing a counter, candy jars set in the windows, shoestrings and boxes of thread on shelves, and a codfish or two sprawled upon nails and covered with netting. From the back door you could descend into a garden, and at the end of the garden was a pig-sty, occupied by a white pig almost as tidy and precise as his owner. In the toll-woman's living room there was a cupboard fringed with tissue paper, a rocking-chair cushioned in red calico, curtains to match, a cooking-stove so small it seemed made for a play-thing, and yellow chairs having gold-leaf ornaments on their backs. She herself was a straight, flat woman, looking much broader in a front or back view than when she stood sidewise toward you. Her face was very good-natured. Altogether she seemed just the ready and capable wife for whom the man went to London after the rats and the mice led him such a life. Though in her case it is probable the wheelbarrow would not have broken, nor would any other mishap have marred the journey.

"You don't live here by yourself, do you?" inquired Grandma Padgett

as the tea and the meal in common warmed an acquaintance which the fact of their being from one State had readily begun.

"Since father died I have," replied the toll-woman. "Father moved in here when about everything else failed him, and he'd lost ambition, and laws! now I am used to it. I might gone back to Ohio, but when you fit me into a place I never want to pull up out of it."

"And don't you ever get afraid, nights or any time, without men folks about?"

"Before I got used to being alone, I did. And there's reason yet every little while. But I only got one bad scare."

A wagon paused at the front door, so near the horses might have put their heads in and sniffed up the merchandise, and the woman went to take toll, before telling about her bad scare.

"How do you manage in the nights?" inquired her guest.

"That's bad about fair-times, when the wild young men get to racin' late along. The pole's been cut when I tied it down, and sometimes they've tried to jump it. But generally the travellers are peaceable enough. I've got a box in the front door like a letter-box, with a slit outside for them to drop change into, and the pole rope pulls down through the window-frame. There ain't so much travel by night as there used to be, and a body learns to be wakeful anyhow if they've ever had the care of sick old people."

"You didn't say how you got scared," remarked aunt Corinne, sitting straight in one of the yellow chairs to impress upon her mind the image of this heroine of the road.

"Well, it was robbers," confessed the toll-woman, "breakin' into the house, that scared me."

Robbers! Aunt Corinne's nephew mentally saw a cavern in one of the neighboring hills, and men in scarlet cloaks and feathers lurking among the bushes. If there is any word sweeter to the young male ear than Indian or Tagger, it is robbers.

"Are there many robbers around here?" he inquired, fixing intent eyes on the toll-woman.

"There used to be plenty of horse-thieves, and is, yet," she replied.

"They've come huntin' them from away over in Illinois. I remember that year the milk-sick was so bad there was more horse-thieves than we've ever heard of since."

"But they ain't true robbers, are they?" said aunt Corinne's nephew in some disgust, his scarlet bandits paling.

"Not the kind that come tryin' the house when I got scared,"

admitted the toll-woman.

"And did they get in?" exclaimed Robert Day's aunt.

"I don't like to think about it yet," remarked the toll-woman, cooling her tea and intent on enjoying her own story. "'Twasn't so very long ago, either. First comes word from this direction that a toll-gate keeper and his wife was tied and robbed at the dead o' night. And then comes word from the other direction of an old man bein' knocked on the head when he opened his door. It wouldn't seem to you there'd be enough money at a toll-gate to make it an object," said the woman, looking at Zene's cross eyes with unconcealed disfavor. "But folks of that kind don't want much of an object."

"They love to rob," suggested Bobaday, enjoying himself.

"They're a desp'rate, evil set," said the toll-woman sternly. "Why, I could tell things that would make your hair all stand on end, about robberies I've known."

Aunt Corinne felt a warning stir in her scalp-lock. But her nephew began to desire permanent encampment in the neighborhood of this toll-gate. Robber-stories which his grandmother not only allowed recited, but drank in with her tea, were luxuries of the road not to be left behind.

"Tell some of them," he urged.

"I'll tell you about their comin' _here_,," said the toll-woman.

"'Twas soon after father's death. They must know there was a lone woman here, and calculated on findin' it an easy job. He'd kept me awake a good deal, for father suffered constant in his last sickness, and though I was done out, I still had the habit of wakin' regular at his medicine-hours. The time was along in the fall, and there was a high wind that night. Fair time, too, so there was more travel on the 'pike of people comin' and goin' to the Fair and from it, in one day, than in a whole week ordinary times.

[Illustration: THE TOLL-WOMAN.]

"I opened my eyes just as the clock struck two and seemed like I heard something at the front door. I listened and listened. It wasn't the wind singin' along the telegraph wires as it does when there's a strong draught east and west. And it wasn't anybody tryin' to wake me up. Some of our farmers that buys stock and has to be out early and late in a droviete way, often tells me beforehand what time o' night they'll be likely to come by, and I set the pole so it'll be easy for them that knows how to tip up. Then they put their money in the box, and tip the pole back after they drive through, to save wakin' me, for the neighbors are real accommodating and they knew father took a heap of care. But the noise I heard wasn't anybody droppin' coppers in the box, nor raisin' or lowerin' the pole. The rope rasps against the hole when the gate goes up or down. It was just like a lock was bein' picked, or a rattly old window bein' slid up by inches.

"I mistrusted right away. It wouldn't do any good for me to holler. The nearest neighbor was two miles off. I hadn't any gun, and never shot off a gun in my life. I would hate to hurt a human bein' that way. Still, I was excited and afraid of gettin' killed myself; so if I'd _had_ a gun I _might_ have shot it off, for by the time I got my dress and stockin's on, that window was up, and somethin' was in that front room. I could hear him step, still as a cat.

"I thought about the toll-money. Everybody knew the box's inside the door, so I was far from leavin' it there till the collector came. I always took the money out and tied it in a canvas sack and hid it. A body would never think of lookin' where I hid that money."

"Where did you hide it?" inquired aunt Corinne.

The toll-woman rose up and went to collect from a carriage at the door. The merry face of a girl in the carriage peeped through the house, and some pleasant jokes were exchanged.

"That's the daughter of the biggest stock man around here," said the toll-woman, returning, and passing over aunt Corinne's question. "She goes to college, but it don't make a simpleton of _her_. She always has a smile and a pleasant word. Her folks are real good friends of mine. They knew our folks in Ohio."

"And did he come right in and grab you?" urged Bobaday, keeping to the main narrative.

"I was that scared for a minute," resumed the toll-woman, "that I hadn't any strength. The middle door never is locked. I leave it on the latch like, so I can hear wheels better. What to do I didn't know, but a body thinks fast at such times. First thing I knew I was on the back doorstep, hookin' the door on the outside. Then a gust of wind like, came around the corner of the house, and voices came with it, and I felt sure there were more men waitin' there to ketch me, if I tried to run."

CHAPTER XXV.

ROBBERS.

It was a light night, but the new moon looked just like it was blown through the sky by the high wind. I noticed that, because I remembered it afterwards.

"Now I was outside, I didn't know which way to turn. If I run to either side, there were the men, and if I took toward the pig-pen they'd see me. And they'd be comin' around and 'd ketch me where I

was."

"What did you do?" exclaimed aunt Corinne, preserving a rigid attitude.

The toll-woman laughed cheerfully as she poured out more tea for herself, Grandma Padgett having waved back the teapot spout.

"I took the only chance I saw and jumped for that there cave."

Both Robert and his aunt arose from their chairs to look out of the back door.

The cave was a structure which I believe is peculiar to the West, being in reality a kind of dug-out. It flourished before people built substantial houses with cellars under them, and held the same relation to the family's summer economy as the potato, apple, and turnip holes did to its winter comfort. Milk, butter, perishable fruit, lard, meats, and even preserves were kept in the cave. It was intended for summer coolness and winter warmth. To make a cave, you lifted the sod and dug out a foot of earth. The bottom was covered with straw. Over this you made boards meet and brace each other with the slope of the roof. The ends were boarded up, leaving room for a door, and the whole outside sodded thickly, so that a cave looked like a sharp-printed bulge in the sward, excepting at that end where the heavy padlocked door closed it. It was a temptation to bad boys and active girls; they always wanted to run over it and hear the hollow sound of the boards under their feet. I once saw a cave break through and swallow one out of such a galloping troupe, to his great dismay, for he was running over an imaginary volcano, and when he sat down to his shoulders in an apple-butter jar, the hot lava seemed ready made to his hand.

From the toll-woman's cave-roof, spikes of yellow mustard were shooting up into the air. The door looked as stout as the opening to a bank vault, though this comparison did not occur to the children, and was secure with staple and padlock and three huge hinges. Evidently, no mischievous feet had cantered over the ridge of this cave.

It stood a few yards from the back door.

"I had the key in my pocket," said the toll-woman, "and ever since then I've never carried it anywhere else. I clapped, it into the padlock and turned, but just as I pulled the door I heard feet comin' around the house full drive. Instead of jumpin' into the cave I jumped behind it. I thought they had me, but I wasn't goin' to be crunched to death in a hole, like a mouse. My stocking-feet slipped, and I came down flat, but right where the shadow of the house and the shadow of the cave fell all over me. If I hadn't slipped I'd been runnin' across that field, and they'd seen me sure. Folks around here made a good deal of fuss over the way things turned out, but I don't, take any more credit than's my due, so I say it just happened that I

didn't try to run further.

"The two men outside unlocked the back door and the one inside came on to the step.

"There's nothin' in the box and nobody in here,' says he. 'She's jumped out o' bed and run and carried the cash with her.'

"Did you look under the bed?' says one of the outsiders. And he ran and looked himself; anyway, he went in the house and came out again. I was glad I hadn't got under the bed.

"This job has to be done quick,' says the first one. 'And the best way is to ketch the woman and make her give up or tell where the stuff is hid. She ain't got far, because I heard her open this door.'

"Then they must have seen the cave door stannin' open. I heard them say something about 'cave,' and come runnin' up.

"Hold on,' says one, and he fires a pistol-shot right into the cave. I was down with my mouth to the ground, flat as I could lay, but the sound of a gun always made me holler out, and holler I did as the ball seemed to come thud! right at me; but it stuck in the back of the cave.

"All right. Here she is!' says the foremost man, and in they all went. I heard them stumble as they stepped down, and one began to blame the others for crowdin' after him when they ought to stopped at the mouth to ketch me if I slipped through his fingers.

"I don't know to this hour how I did it," exclaimed the toll-woman, fanning herself, "nor when I thought of it. But the first thing I felt sure of I had that door slammed to, and the key turned in the padlock, and them three robbers was ketched like mice in a trap, instead of it's bein' me!"

Robert Day gave a chuckle of satisfaction, but aunt Corinne braced herself against the door-frame and gazed upon the magic cave with still wider eyes.

"Did they yell?" inquired Bobaday.

"It ain't fit to tell," resumed the toll-woman, "what awful language them men used; and they kicked the door and the boards until I thought break through they would if they had to heave the whole weight, of dirt and sod out of the top. Then I heard somebody comin' along the 'pike, and for a minute I felt real discouraged; for, thinks I, if there's more engaged to help them, what's a poor body to do?"

"But 'twas a couple of stock-men, riding home, and they stopped at the gate, and I run through the open house to tell my story, and it didn't take long for them with pistols in their pockets and big black

whips loaded with lead in the handles, to get the fellows out and tie 'em up firm. I hunted all the new rope in the house, and they took the firearms away from the robbers, and drove 'em off to jail, and the robbers turned out to be three of the most desp'rate characters in the State, and they're in prison now for a long term of years."

"What did you do the rest of the night?" inquired Grandma Padgett.

"O, I locked everything tight again, and laid down till daylight," replied the toll-woman, with somewhat boastful indifference. "Folks haven't got done talkin' yet about that little jail in my back yard," she added, laughing. "They came from miles around to look into it and see where the men pretty nigh kicked the boards loose."

This narrative was turned over and over by the children after they resumed their journey, and the toll-woman and her cave had faded out in distance. If they saw a deserted cabin among the hollows of the woods, it became the meeting place of robbers. Now that aunt Corinne's nephew turned his mind to the subject, he began to think the whole expedition out West would be a failure--an experience not worth alluding to in future times--unless the family were well robbed on the way. Jonathan and Thrusty Ellen, in the great overland colony, would have Indians to shudder at, a desert and mountains to cross, besides the tremendous Mississippi River. Robert would hate to meet Jonathan in coming days--and he had a boy's faith that he should be constantly repassing old acquaintances in this world--and have no peril to put in the balance against Jonathan's adventures. Of course he wanted to come out on the right side of the peril, it does not tell well otherwise.

But while aunt Corinne's mind ran as constantly on robbers, they had no charms for her. She did not want to be robbed, and was glad her lines had not fallen in the lonely toll-house. Being robbed appeared to her like the measles, mumps, or whooping-cough; more interesting in a neighboring family than in your own. She would avoid it if possible, yet the conviction grew upon her that it was not to be escaped. The strange passers-by who once pleasantly varied the road, now became objects of dread. Though Zene got past them in safety, and though they gave the carriage a wide road, aunt Corinne never failed to turn and watch them to a safe distance, lest they should make a treacherous charge in the rear.

Had they been riding through some dismal swamp, the landscape's influence would have accounted for all these terrors. But it was the pretty region of Western Indiana, containing hills and bird-songs enough to swallow up a thousand stories of toll-gate robberies in happy sight and sound.

Grandma Padgett, indeed, soon put her ban upon the subject of caves and night-attacks. But she could not prevent the children thinking. Nor was she able to drive the carriage and at the same time sit in the wagon when they rode with Zene and stop the flow of recollection to which they stimulated him. While sward, sky, and trees became

violet-tinted to her through her glasses, and she calmly meditated and chewed a bit of calamus or a fennel seed, Bobaday and aunt Corinne huddled at the wagon's mouth, and Zene indulgently harrowed up their souls with what he heard from a gentleman who had been in the Mexican war.

"The very gentleman used to visit at your grand-marm's house," said Zene to Robert, "and your marm always said he was much of a gentleman," added Zene to aunt Corinne. "Down in the Mexican country when they didn't fight they stayed in camp, and sometimes they'd go out and hunt. Man that'd been huntin', come runnin' in one day scared nigh to death. He said he'd seen the old Bad Man. So this gentleman and some more of the fine officers, they went to take a look for themselves. They hunted around a good spell. Most of them gave it up and went back: all but four. The four got right up to him."

"O don't, Zene!" begged aunt Corinne, feeling that she could not bear the description.

But to Robert Day's mind arose the picture of Apollyon, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he uttered something like a snort of enjoyment, saying:

"Go on, Zene."

[Illustration: ZENE'S WILD MAN.]

"I guess it was a crazy darkey or Mexican," Zene was careful to explain. "He was covered with oxhide all over, so he looked red and white hairy, and the horns and ears were on his head. He had a long knife, and cut weeds and bark, and muttered and chuckled to himself. He was ugly," acknowledged Zene. "The gentleman said he never saw anything better calkilated to look scary, and the four men followed him to his den. They wouldn't shoot him, but they wanted to see what he was, and he never mistrusted. After a long round-about, they watched him crawl on all-fours into a hole in a hill, and round the mouth of the hole he'd built up a tunnel of bones. The bones smelt awful," said Zene. "And he crawled in with his weeds and bark in his hand, and they didn't see any more of him. That's a true story," vouched Zene, snapping his whip-lash at Johnson, "but your grandmarm wouldn't like for me to tell it to you. Such things ain't fit for children to hear."

Robert Day felt glad that Zene's qualms of repentance always came after the offence instead of before, and in time to prevent the forbidden tale.

Yet, having made such ardent preparation for robbers, and tuned their minds to the subject by every possible influence, the children found they were approaching the last large town on the journey without encountering any.

This was Terre Haute. One farmer on the road, being asked the distance, said, it was so many miles to Tarry Hoot. Another, a little later met,

pronounced the place Turry Hut; and a very trim, smooth-looking man whom Zene classed as a banker or judge, called it Tare Hote. So the inhabitants and neighbors of Terra Haute were not at all unanimous in the sound they gave her French name; nor are they so to this day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FAIR AND THE FIERCE BANDIT.

At Terra Haute, where they halted for the night, Robert Day was made to feel the only sting which the caravan mode of removal ever caused him.

The tavern shone resplendent with lights. When Grandma Padgett's party went by the double doors of the dining-room, to ascend the stairs, they glanced into what appeared a bower or a bazaar of wonderful sights. They had supper in a temporary eating-room, and the waiter said there was a fair in the house. Not an agricultural display, but something got up by a ladies' sewing-society to raise money for poor people.

Now Robert Day and Corinne knew all about an agricultural display. They had been to the State Fair at Columbus, and seen cattle standing in long lines of booths, quilts, and plows, and chickens, pies, bread, and fancy knitting, horses, cake stands, and crowds of people. They considered it the finest sight in the world, except, perhaps, a fabulous crystal palace which was or had been somewhere a great ways off, and which everybody talked about a great deal, and some folks had pictured on their window blinds. But a fair got up by a ladies' sewing-society to raise money for the poor, was so entirely new and tantalizing to them that they begged their guardian to take them in.

Grandma Padgett said she had no money to spare for foolishness, and her expenses during the trip footed up to a high figure. Neither could she undertake to have the trunks in from the wagon and get out their Sunday clothes. But in the end, as both children were neatly dressed, and the fair was to help the poor, she gave them a five-cent piece each, over and above admission money, which was a fip'ney-bit, for children, the waiter said. Zene concluded he would black his boots and look into the fair awhile also, and as he could keep a protecting eye on her young family, and had authority to send them up-stairs in one hour and a half by the bar-room time, Grandma Padgett went to bed. She was glad the journey was so nearly over, for every night found her quite tired out.

Zene, magnifying his own importance and authority, ushered aunt Corinne and Robert into the fair, and limped after them whenever he thought they needed admonition or advice. The landlord's pert young son noticed this and made his intimates laugh at it. Besides, he was

gorgeously attired in blue velvet jacket and ruffles and white trousers, and among the crowds of grown people coming and going, other children shone in resplendent attire. Aunt Corinne felt the commonness of her calico dress. She had a "white" herself, if Ma Padgett had only let her put it on, but this could not be explained to all the people at the fair. And there were so many things to look at, she soon forgot the white. Dolls of pink and pearly wax, with actual hair, candy or wooden dogs, cats, and all domestic animals, tables of cakes, and lines of made-up clothing which represented the sewing society's labors. There was too much crowding for comfort, and too much pastry trodden into the floor; and aunt Corinne and her nephew felt keen anxiety to spend their five-cent pieces to the best advantage. She was near investing in candy kisses, when yellow and scarlet-backed books containing the history of "Mother Hubbard," or the "Babes in the Woods," or "Little Red Riding Hood," attracted her eye, and she realized what life-long regret she must have suffered for spending five cents on candy kisses, when one such volume might be hers for the same money.

Just as aunt Corinne laid her silver on the book counter, however, and gave her trembling preference to the "History of Old Dame Trot and her Cat," Bobaday seized her wrist and excitedly told her there was a magic-lantern show connected with the fair, which could be seen at five cents per pair of eyes. Dame Trot remained unpurchased, and the coin returned to aunt Corinne's warm palm. But she inquired with caution,

"What's a magic-lantern show?"

"Why, the man, you know," explained Robert, "has pitctures in a lantern, and throws light through 'em, and they spread out on a wet sheet on the wall. The room's all dark except the place on the wall. A Chinese man eatin' mice in his sleep: he works his jaws! And about Saul in the Bible, when he was goin' to kill the good people, and it says, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' And when they let him down in a basket. And there's a big star like grandma's star quilt, only it keeps turning all kinds of colors and working in and out on itself. And a good many more. Zene went in. He said he wanted to see if we ought to look at it. And he'll stand by the door and pay our money to the man if we want to go. There's such a crowd to get in."

Robert Day's aunt caught the fire of his enthusiasm and went straight with him to the door wherein the magic lantern performed. A crowd of children were pushing up, but Zene, more energetic than courteous pushed his charges ahead so that they gained chairs before the landlord's son could make his choice.

[Illustration: AT THE SEWING SOCIETY FAIR.]

He sat down directly behind Robert and aunt Corinne, and at once began to annoy them with impertinent remarks.

"Movers' young ones are spry," said the landlord's son, who had been

petted on account of his pretty face until he was the nuisance of the house. "I wouldn't be a movers' young one."

Robert felt a stinging throb in his blood, but sat still, looking at the wall. Aunt Corinne, however, turned her head and looked witheringly at the blue-jacketed boy.

"Movers' young ones have to wear calico," he continued, "and their lame pap goes lippity-clink around after them."

"He thinks Zene's our father!" exclaimed aunt Corinne, blazing at the affront she received.

"Don't mind him," said Robert, slowly. "He's the hostler's boy, and used to staying in the stable. He doesn't know how to behave when they let him into the house."

This bitter skirmishing might have become an open engagement at the next exchange of fires, for the landlord's son stood up in rage while his chums giggled, and Robert felt terribly equal to the occasion. He told Zene next day he had his fist already doubled, and he didn't care if the landlord put them all in jail. But just then the magic light was turned upon the wall, the landlord's son was told by twenty voices to sit down out of the way, the lantern man himself sternly commanding it. So he sunk into his seat feeling much less important, and the wonders proceeded though Aunt Corinne felt she should always regret turning her back on the Dame Trot book and coming in there to have Zene called her lame pap, while Robert wondered gloomily if any stigma did attach to movers' children. He had supposed them a class to be envied.

This grievance put the robbers out of his mind when they trotted ahead next day. The Wabash River could scarcely soothe his ruffled complacency. And never an inch of the Wabash River have I seen that was not beautiful and restful to the eye. It flows limpidly between varying banks, and has a trick of throwing up bars and islands, wooded to the very edges--captivating places for any tiny Crusoe to be wrecked upon. Skiffs lay along the shore, and small steamers felt their way in the channel. It was a river full of all sorts of promises; so shallow here that the pebbles shone in broad sheets like a floor of opals wherever you might wade in delight, so deep and shady with sycamore canopies there, that a good swimmer would want to lie in ambush like a trout, at the bottom of the swimming hole, half a June day.

Perhaps it was the sight of the Wabash River which suggested washing clothes to Grandma Padgett. She said they were now near the Illinois State line, and she would not like to reach the place with everything dirty. There was always plenty to do when a body first got home, without hurrying up wash-day.

So when they passed a small place called Macksville, and came to Sugar Creek, she called a halt, and they spent the day in the woods.

Sugar Creek, though not sweet, was clear. Zene carried pails full of it to fill the great copper kettle, and slung this over a fire. The horses munched at their feed-box or cropped grass, wandering with their heads tied to their forefeet to prevent their cantering off. Grandma Padgett at the creek's brink, set up her tubs and buried herself to the elbows in suds, and aunt Corinne with a matronly countenance, assisted. All that day Robert went barelegged, and splashed water, wading out far to dip up a gourdful; and he thought it was fun to help stretch the clothes-line among saplings, and lift the scalded linen on a paddle into the tub, losing himself in the stream. Ordinary washdays as he remembered them, were rather disagreeable. Everybody had to wake early, and a great deal of fine-split wood was needed. The kitchen smelt of suds, and the school-lunch was scraps left from Sunday instead of new cake, turnovers and gingerbread.

[Illustration: GRANDMA PADGETT'S WASHING-DAY IN THE WOODS.]

But this woods wash-day was an experience to delight in, like sailing on a log in the water, and pretending you are a bold navigator, or lashing the rocking-chair to a sled for a sleighride. It was something out of the common. It was turning labor into fantastic tricks.

They had an excellent supper, too, and after dusk the clothes stood in glintly array on the line, the camp-fire shone ruddy in a place where its smoke could not offend them, and they were really like white stones encircling an unusual day.

But when Robert awoke in the night they gave him a pang of fright, and he was sorry his grandma had decided to let them bleach in the dew of the June woods. From his bed in the carriage he could see both the road and the lines of clothes. A horseman came along the road and halted. He was not attracted by the camp-fire, because that had died to ashes. He probably would not have heard the horses stamp in their sleep, for his own horse's feet made a noise. And the wagon cover was hid by foliage. But woods and sight were not dark enough to keep the glint of the washing out of his eyes. Robert saw this rider dismount and heard him walking cautiously into their camp.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NIGHT PICTURE OF HOME.

Here at last was the robber. After you have given over expecting a robber, and even feel that you can do without him, to find him stealing up in the night when you are camped in a lonely place and not near enough either tent or wagon to wake the other sleepers for reinforcements, is trying to the nerves.

Bobaday sat up in the carriage, bracing his courage for the emergency. He could take a cushion, jump out and attack the man with that. It was not a deadly weapon, and would require considerable force back of it to do damage. The whip might be better. He reached for the whip and turned the handle uppermost. There was no cave at hand to trap this robber in, but a toll-woman should not show more spirit than Robert Day Padgett in the moment of peril.

Though the robber advanced cautiously, he struck his foot against a root or two, and stumbled, making the horse take irregular steps also, for he was leading his horse with the bridle over his arm.

And he came directly up to the carriage. Robert grasped the whip around the middle with both hands, but some familiar attitude in the stranger's dim outline made him lower it.

"Bobby," said the robber, speaking guardedly, "are you in here?"

"Pa Padgett," exclaimed Robert Day, "is that you?"

"Hush! Yes. It's me, of course. Don't wake your grandma. Old folks are always light sleepers."

Pa Padgett reached into the carriage, shook hands with his boy, and kissed him. How good the bushy beard felt against Bobaday's face.

He said nothing about robbers, while his father unsaddled his horse and tied the animal snugly to a limb.

Then Pa Padgett put his foot on the hub and sprang into the carriage.

"Is there room for me to stretch myself in here tonight too?"

"Of course there is. But don't you want to see grandma and aunt Krin?"

"Wait till morning. We'll all take an early start. Have they kept well?"

"Everybody's well," replied Bobaday. "But how did you know we were here?"

"I'd have passed by," said Pa Padgett, "if I hadn't seen all that white strung along. Been washing clothes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I made out the carriage, and something like a wagon back in the bushes. So I came up to examine."

"We thought you'd be at the State line," said Robert.

"Oh, I intended to ride out till I met you," replied his father.

"But I'd have missed you on the plain road; and gone by to the next town to stop for you, if it hadn't been for the washing. You better go to sleep again now. Have you had a nice trip?"

"Oh, awful nice! There was a little girl lost, and we got her to her mother again, and Zene and the wagon were separated from us once"--

"Zene has taken good care of you, has he?"

"He didn't have to take care of us!" remonstrated Robert. "And last night when there was a fair, I thought he stuck around more than he was needed: There was the meanest boy that stuck up his hose at movers' children."

Aunt Corinne's brother Tip laughed under his breath.

"You'll not be movers' children much longer. The home is over yonder, only half a day's ride or so."

"Is it a nice place?"

"I think it's a nice place. There's prairie, but there's timber too. And there's money to be made. You go to sleep now. You'll wake your grandma, and I expect she's tired."

"Yes, sir, I'm going. Is there a garden?"

"There's a good bit of ground for a garden; and there's a planting of young catalpas. Far as the eye can see in one direction, it's prairie. On the other side is woods. The house is better than the old one. I had to build, and I built pretty substantial. Your grandma's growing old. She'll need comforts in her old age, and we must put them around her, my man."

Bobaday thought about this home to which he and his family were to grow as trees grasp the soil. Already it seemed better to him than the one he had left. There would be new playmates, new landscapes, new meadows to run in, new neighbors, new prospects. The home, so distant during the journey that he had scarcely thought about it at all, now seemed to inclose him with its pleasant walls, which the smell of new timbers made pleasant twice over.

Boswell and Johnson, under the carriage, waked by the cautious talk from that sound sleep a hard day's hunts after woods things induces, and perhaps sniffing the presence of their master and the familiar air of home, rose up to shake themselves, and one of them yawned until his jaws creaked.

"It's the dogs," whispered Bobaday.

"We mustn't set them to barking," cautioned Pa Padgett.

"Well, good-night," said the boy, turning on his cushion.

"Good-night. This caravan must move on early in the morning."

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